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THE
HERO IN THY SOUL

BEING
AN ATTEMPT TO FACE LIFE GALLANTLY

BY

ARTHUR JOHN GOSSIP

"I charge thee throw not away the hero in thy soul."

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TO

MY WIFE

MY DAILY COMRADE STILL

WITH

GRATITUDE AND LOVE AND HOPE

"How can I thank God enough for you? Night and day I pray with eager longing that I may see your face. With His own hand may God our Father and Jesus our Lord direct my way to you."—PAUL THE APOSTLE.

"With all your might enjoy the spring flowers,
But do not forget the time of our love and pride.
Know that, if I live, I will come back again;
And, if I die, we will go on thinking of each other."
General Su Wu's Farewell to his Wife (B.C. 100).

"Doth not death fright you?
Who would be afraid on't
Knowing to meet such excellent company
In the other world?"
WEBSTER'S *Duchess of Malfi.*

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THREE of these studies have already appeared in print. I am most grateful to Sir James Marchant, K.C.B., LL.D., and to Putnam's Sons for kind permission to reproduce "A Message for Grey Days" from their *British Preachers* (Second Series); to Mr. Frederick North and James Clarke & Co. for a similar favour with regard to "On the Art of Thinking in Terms of the Cross," which appeared in their *Lenten Sermons*; and to T. & T. Clark and the Editors of *The Expository Times*, in which journal, under the title of "The New Righteousness," was published what is now called "What Christ means by a Good Man."

"But when Life tumbles in, what then?" was the first sermon preached after my wife's bewilderingly sudden and undreamed-of death. The office-bearers of Beechgrove Church, Aberdeen, included it in a memorial booklet issued for private circulation. It has wandered so far over the world, and I have received so pathetically many requests for copies from people in sorrow, that I have included the sermon here, not without diffidence and some shrinking of soul. I have not had the heart to work over it; and it is set down as it was delivered.

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"This will not be a good book. No matter! if, through it, great things are dreamed about!"

FLAUBERT.

"I see a universe, I suppose eternally different from yours; a solemn, a terrible, but a very joyous and noble universe, where suffering is not at least wantonly inflicted though it falls with dispassionate partiality, but where it may be, and generally is, nobly borne; where, above all, *any brave man* may make out a life which shall be happy for himself, and, by so being, beneficent to those about him. And if he fail, why should I hear him weeping? I mean if I fail, why should I weep? Why should he hear me?"

STEVENSON.

"Not by flattering our appetites; no, by awakening the heroic that slumbers in every heart, can any religion gain followers."

CARLYLE.

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THE HERO IN THY SOUL

I

HOW OTHERS GAINED THEIR COURAGE

"He rescued me from so terrible a death. He rescues still, and I rely upon Him for the hope that He will continue to rescue me." 2 Cor. i. 10 (Moffatt).

THE man in the street with his confident opinions is nearly always twenty years behind the times. Which may account, in part, for the curious phenomenon that even yet so many people talk of religion as if it were a thing to be taken not quite seriously. And this upon the ground that in that whole region words have less than their full and usual significance, and facts—ah! well, they are not, of course, real facts, not like the facts of science or of daily life, but something much more vague and dim and insubstantial.

Have you yourself never experienced something of that feeling? We pass out of the rush and bustle of the obvious world obtrusively thrusting itself upon us, jangling our nerves, and deafening our ears with its loud, inescapable noises so evidently there—out of all those staring, solid, tangible things that we can't doubt, into the hush and quiet of God's presence. And have you never had an uneasy suspicion that you had surely come into a world of dreams, of things somehow less solid, not so sure, much farther off; never felt almost desperately, like the Lady of Shalott, that you have immured yourself among impalpable and ghostlike shadows, that you are sick of them, can't bear them any longer—these hopes

that are only hopes, these promises that are only promises—must get out among things you can grip and hold, real things that have some body and substantiality!

And yet how life tears that complacent assumption into ragged tatters, mocking it to our faces, telling us, curtly and in blunt words, that if we wish to find something upon which we can depend and build we must look for it—where? In the dear homely facts of daily life? Ah, no! Out of the darkness, without warning, there may leap a rushing wind, and in one moment we may find ourselves staring at what can't be true and yet is true; standing in a sudden echoing emptiness, among the tumbled ruins of our home all fallen flat.

> "As much as in a thousand years she's dead,
> Yet is to-day the day on which she died."

In science? Ask those who have the right to speak and they will tell you, not shamefacedly but proudly, that the theories of to-day are obsolete to-morrow, for we are moving on.

And indeed, if, for a little, the new wine of their bewildering discoveries went to their heads, that bumptious mood has passed; and to-day scientists are very humble, even abashed; have realized that all our vaunted knowledge is but a flickering taper that serves only to make darkness visible; that the farther we advance the more elusive and inscrutable do the central mysteries become; that it is quite unlikely, if indeed not on the face of things impossible, that here at least, and with our so inadequate equipment, we can ever know, or hope to know, things as they really are. "In considering the relations of science and religion," says Professor Eddington, "it is a very relevant fact that physics is now in the course of abandoning all claim to a type of knowledge which it formerly asserted without hesitation." Our laws, as we grandiloquently call them, are but working hypotheses, that serve their day, and then must be largely amended.

Or shall we look towards theology for something more reliable and permanent. That also were in vain. Why, think! Must it not always be as on the day of Pentecost when people understood the gospel only because each heard it in his own speech. In Britain we preach it in English. But cross to France; and, if you would make it intelligible there, you must use French; while, moving on across the Rhine, you will have to take to German, or your message, nay, Christ's message, will mean nothing to these last hearers' minds. In each case it is the same gospel; but every land has its own tongue. And every generation, too, has its own mental language. And, only hearing Christ in its own intellectual dialect will any one of them begin to understand, be moved, and won. And thus theologies come and theologies go, but Christ remains, the Christ who is far bigger than the boldest interpretation of Him, and by and by makes every one of them look shamefully inadequate; and we have just to try once more.

If you would find something against which you can lean your back and know that it will never give, you can and must look for it in religion. For, so far from religion being a dim and ghostlike thing that shrinks back into the twilight and fears to face the blaze of day, it is the only kind of knowledge that lies within the reach of every one. Of necessity we take our science from the scientists, for all that kind of thing lies outside our own world: in philosophy we bow to the philosophers, for what do, or can, the mass of us plain people know about it? But the tremendous assertions of religion are open to the test of every one. Any one can pray, and discover for himself whether it really works; any one who dares can trust in God, and so determine by personal experiment whether he is the better for it or no. And Christianity claims and invites that popular experimental verdict, quite confident as to the issue. And with reason. For every one who puts it to the test discovers it is true; and thereafter rests his faith, not upon

theories which may be false (how can he tell ?) but upon solid and unchallengeable facts, the facts of his own life.

That is what men forget. Always we must remember, when reading the amazing Scripture promises, that these people are not simply theorizing and supposing ; they are passing on experience. They are not wondering what God is like, and crying, Ah, if He were this ! and what if He were that ! But they themselves have met God face to face ; and they burst in to share with us the glorious news of what they have proved Him to be. When Moses tells us with such happy confidence that amid the perplexities of life we can count on this that God is merciful, and gracious, and incredibly slow to anger towards even the worst, and we crowd about him, asking eagerly, But how do you know ? he answers with a just assurance, " Because, whenever He has passed by in my life, whenever I have come on Him and caught a glimpse of Him, He has been that to me. That's how I know." And a very good way, too ! That is to say, here is a man who founds not upon theory but experience ; and so it always is. What John declares with so much emphasis as to his own witness to Christ is true of them all. Believe us, they all cry, this is no mere carried story we have heard blowing about the world, which may be true and then again may not, no idle rumour we ourselves cannot corroborate, and which we pass on merely for what it may be worth. It is what we have seen, we speaking to you now, what we have heard, what these very hands of ours have handled ; it is first-hand testimony to which we personally pledge ourselves, and upon which you can rely. We, talking to you, guarantee it. That is the mark of all authentic religious literature : to an enormous extent it is, and must be, autobiographic. Father John of the Greek Church habitually ends his sappiest passages with one ever-recurring chorus of a phrase, " This also is experience " ; not merely, what I have dreamed, and hoped, and wished, but what I myself have definitely proved. From the very moment

that, daringly taking Christ at His amazing word, any one sails forth to find what admittedly does sound flatly incredible, bare faith keeps changing into knowledge, and more and more one founds upon solid experiences, ever accumulating, ever growing more unchallengeable, and immeasurably sure. Religion is no misty thing; it rests upon the surest, the most readily accessible, the best authenticated of all facts.

So it was even with Jesus Christ. When He appeared, men whispered together excitedly and stared after Him in open astonishment. For here was a new note of authority, a message in which there was no "probably" and no "perhaps," but that was rung out with assurance in the very name of very God. And Christ did that because, long before He began to teach it, He Himself had lived it out, knew from experience that it was absolutely sure. When He speaks so confidently of the wonders of prayer, He so speaks because He Himself had tried. When He assured troubled souls, at their wits' end to find the bare necessities of life, that God would not, and could not, fail them, He was looking back at many a grim time in His own life when in that crowded home, in those bare days of lean and menacing poverty, things had slipped perilously near the edge, and yet always miraculously they came through, for all the world as in that tense moment of danger, at the brow of the hill, with ugly passion surging round Him, when one minute all seemed over, and the next somehow He had passed clear. When Jesus preached, He didn't just think, or suppose, or paint flimsy if beautiful day-dreams; He knew, was reading from His own experience.

People cry out against the wasted thirty years, grow quite hot and indignant over it. There was God holding in His hand the most glorious soul by far that this earth ever saw, and what did He do with Him? Did He set Him down in some high place where every word and deed of His must tell on multitudes? Not He! But, with an imbecile prodigality, He squandered that marvellous

Being for whole years and years upon the squalid trivialities of a petty business in a sleepy country town, whose empty streets dozed drowsily day after day in the hot sun. Up on the high road, clouds of dust showed where real happenings were blowing past out of the great and busy world; but no breeze ever caused a ripple on the still surface of the stupid monotony of the dull little place itself. And Christ was lost for nearly all His life in that tame backwater, with this result for one, that we possess only some meagre gleanings from the wide fields of His wonderful mind, instead of all we might have had. The sheer unutterable, unforgivable waste of it!

But not one second of it all was wasted. Day by day, Jesus was feeling His bold way to those marvellous truths of His on which the world has been subsisting ever since; year by year He was proving them over and over, ever more drastically. And all life can be lived out in a very little place. Into the windows of that cottage there came peering the dark mysteries of things, there too: over its floor there crept those cold and shuddery shadows that touch every heart at last, and set it shivering. For one thing, Joseph died, so it would seem; and they, too, sat in a broken little circle in a strangely quiet house, trying to hide the vacant place that would not hide. And there were all the lesser fretting rubs of life that, in one sense, are even harder to meet gallantly. When the dark falls about us, we look up, awed, and hushed, and reverent. This is God, we feel instinctively! But the petty ills are apt merely to irritate us into temper and ill-humour. Yet yonder too, no doubt, there were impossible customers, angrily importunate, and with a blind disregard for the rights of every one except themselves; and all the usual teasing problems like that of the other carpenter a little down the road, and competition, and such-like things, that to this day so puzzle loyal souls striving to follow closely in Christ's steps. And there, at the hot dusty heart of common life, Jesus proved that we need not become soured and peevish when

things will not run our way, that we can meet it all with a serene and valiant equanimity; found, looking round on other lives, how bleak, and parched, and dull, that He possessed a happiness they did not know; a peace of heart they did not share, poor, fretted, fussy, careworn souls; a strength that might be their strength too; and they so needed it to bring them through! And He could not keep these treasures of His to Himself, had to rise up and share them with whoever would accept them from His eager hands. The glorious news that Jesus brings is not mere rumour; it is built up on the solid facts of His own daily life.

And so with Paul. Wordsworth tells us that his greatest inspirations had a way of coming to him in the night, and that he had to teach himself to write in the dark that he might not lose them. We, too, had better learn this art of writing in the dark. For it were indeed tragic to bear the pain, yet lose what it was sent to teach us. And have you ever noticed that as a rule Paul made his discoveries not on some golden day when his world lay soaked in sunshine, but in the dark and cold of bitter nights. Then it was that, like glorious constellations, they rose before his staggered mind, and that the vastnesses there are in Christ opened out endlessly about him.

For long he had a haunting day-dream that would not let him rest, and wisely he took it to God. And God said No. And the man flatly would not have that answer, but went back again and still again, was clamorous, insistent, even indignant, protested that he had God's promises and claimed them, that there was nothing mean or selfish in his wish, that he could look God in the eyes when he was praying it—that all he sought was a further efficiency for Christ, that he might be delivered from what was manifestly hampering him in his service. And God said obstinately No. Plainly the man was hurt and staggered, yet he tells us it was then and there, through that disquieting dispensation, he learned the marvellous sufficiency of God for

the most hopeless-looking people, and Christ's queer skill with blunt and most unserviceable-looking weapons. That's why I know He will avail for you, he says; am sure that no one ever need lose heart in the same world as God. For I have proved it.

So, in this passage, he tells us how once death came very near. He himself did not feel that it was time to die. His lifework lay unfinished; there was so much to do, there were so many hopes to fashion into fact before he should have earned his grave. And so loyally he turned his back upon the dawning glory, and struggled to hold on. Yet it seemed it was not to be. Steadily his life ebbed away, and he prepared to pass. And then something happened. Just what it was he did not know. It was not I; it was not any one, he says. God Himself intervened, and pulled me back with His own hand. And it is things like that, he adds, that make me certain that He can do anything for you; yes, even that, that you rule out at once as on the face of it an obvious exception; yes, even that; yes, even for you!

That was Paul's settled mood. Always when he looked back over his life he saw dangers and difficulties and scaring things in plenty. And yet they did not scare him, because always what caught and held his eyes was God—God always there, always amazingly sufficient, and every time clearing a way for him out of impossible places to impossible heights. "He saved me," is his verdict on it all: again and again He saved me; somehow He has always saved me. Common honesty compels me to declare it. And that is why I know He can save you. For I build, not on theories fine spun as cobwebs and as easily broken through, but on the staring and immovable facts of my own personal life. It is my own experience, he says in one place, that gives me my hope. That is a phrase worth pondering. For experience often seems so vulgar and so disillusionizing. What new generation ever started off without open contempt for its

fools of predecessors, and the appalling bungle they have left of things? Impossible! they scoff. Don't talk such silly nonsense! Let us get our hands on it; and one strong wrench, and we shall show whether the crooked can't come straight. Always they are so ardent, so enthusiastic, and so sure! And yet by middle life always they are so tame and very ordinary. Ah well! they laugh, remember we were very young, didn't know life (how could we?), had no idea human nature was so stubborn and intractable. What we have made of life is, of course, not ideal. But we must take it as we find it, and do with it what we can. And so they, too, surrender to forces too strong for them and settle down with a poor second best. But Paul knows nothing of all that. Here is a man who has found a thing that works, that does things, to which simply nothing is impossible; knows it because he himself has proved it.

I wish we could re-catch that note, which the Church has too much lost. And yet till it rings out again there is not much hope of large happenings. Aye, and why should it not? For my part I am sick and tired of all this whimpering and wailing, of conferences always complaining about something, of all these stereotyped articles with the inevitable heading in bold type, "What's wrong with the Church?" For one thing, it is such silly psychology. Have you ever studied the art of advertising? It is built up on an accurate knowledge of the working of these curious minds of ours. And did you ever come on any one or anything, except the Church, to whom it had occurred to splash on every hoarding, so to speak, enormous posters running thus: "We confess that fewer and fewer are coming about our place of business, that not many of those who do are altogether satisfied, and that we ourselves are somewhat sceptical as to the real value of what we have to offer. Still, if you care to drop in and take your chance, it may not do you much good, but it would be kind to us!" That, most certainly, is not the way to win folk back. In the early days the Church swept the

world because it ran about shouting in happy excitement that they had found it, really found it! and that no one need surrender to sin any more; and others, listening, felt that here was something worth considering. If they had been as dismally minded as we are, they, too, could easily have had their staring headlines, "What's wrong with the Church?" as the Epistles to the Corinthians make all too plain. But they preferred to noise abroad the marvellous things Christ was accomplishing. And we could do that just as honestly.

Hermas in his day, too, had largely lost hope for the Church, saw her in vision as an old feeble woman too infirm to stand, collapsed upon a chair. Yet, looking closer, he saw that, although her skin was withered, her face was young and beautiful, and she was standing strong and vigorous upon her feet: and looking yet again, how she had changed? Where was there any sign of any feebleness in this exquisite vision, seated in regal splendour upon her immovable throne. What does this mean? he asked. And the angel made answer. She looked old and infirm to you, only because your own spirit had grown worldly and broken and unexpectant. God in His pity sent some faith into your heart, and you saw that His Church is greater than you had believed! He increased your own courage, and you realized she is invincible. It was not she, but you, that was at fault.

If only we would ring out more of the good news about Jesus Christ and less of the bad news about the Church, we would do greatly better. And why should we not? For these bewilderments are happening still in countless lives on every day. And it is most unfair to Jesus Christ that we, too, are not telling it out over the world. For thereby we are robbing Him of His just dues, giving a wrong impression, making those outside, poor ignorant fools, believe that there is nothing practical and really helpful in the faith, we who profess it being witnesses. And yet we who have tried it know that there is everything in it, know

that in our characters and lives it is still accomplishing the old wonders for us, breaking set habits, pulling down strongholds, building up better things, all just as certainly to-day as ever in the past.

I know our reticence is due to our uneasy knowledge of these fickle hearts of ours. We fear, we know indeed, that if Christ should forget us for even one moment we should slip and fall, and so falling, after our proud boasts, cover ourselves with hot confusion. And yet it is not honest towards our Master not to confess what He has done for us. "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so." Poor things though we may be, is it not marvellous that Christ has made out of such sorry stuff as us even this that we are. Think of us setting off to school, so ignorant, so inexperienced, into this dangerous, slippery world! And we have come thus far, not, it may be, with any signal spiritual honours; but, blessed be God's name, without signal disgrace. And why? Only because, times without number, Christ has stood by us and has saved us, and has proved His promises in our experience as surely as to Paul.

When Shackleton and his comrades were fighting their slow, impossible way across that frozen land, chilled to the very soul, with heads bowed low against the icy blizzards, with weak and stumbling feet, and half dead with fatigue, they came through, so later they confessed to one another, though at the time they said no word of it, only because each of them felt that "Some One else was there more than they could see." We, too, have come through so far only because always there has been Some One else beside us, more than we could see—because always a Voice has roused us when we fell asleep, always a Hand has pulled us back when, unknowingly, we were tottering on the sheer edge of some precipice, always there has been One who saved us. "You don't mean to say," they scoffed at a scientist not so long ago in Paris, "that you credit that old impossible fable of Christianity—you, a man of science!" And he replied, "I do, and just

because I am a man of science. For, as such, I dare not and cannot ignore the plain and staring facts of my own life."

But Paul goes further—speaks not in the past tense alone, but in the present no less certainly. He saved me, he says, yes, and He is saving me. That is the mark of a healthy religion. If you have to turn and look far back into the receding years to find your evidences, there is something wrong. Have you ever noticed how one-ideaed the prophets are; and that often all that they have to say to depressed people is to stop them in the midst of their fussy anxieties and sour bemoanings, and ask them, "Do you know God is alive?" Alive! we say. Of course He is alive! And yet it is not easy to remember that, and go upon our way assuming it is true. He is quite obvious to us in the history of Israel, working wonders, drawing all eyes, too manifest there to be overlooked. But do we recognize Him guiding, overruling, breaking through the happenings of to-day? Once, we say, He was very marvellous in the great dim long ago. But in our noisy, prosaic, smoky, unspiritual, modern world such things, of course, are not to be expected; and we don't expect them. Unconsciously we assume God has grown less efficient than He used to be, so that we don't hope for anything much from Him nowadays, can easily enough forget that He is there, really believe, as Maurice said of Carlyle, "in a God who died in the days of Oliver Cromwell." Some I know there are who hold the notion that God is not really God as yet, is only growing towards the wonderful being He will one day be—an odd idea surely, yet at least with a hope in it and before it. But most of us seem rather to imagine Him as a dying Sun, once how tremendous in its splendour, but now with dwindling fires, and cooling glories—a ghastly view, the end of which seems chaos, and black night, and evil over all, and God gone out! Nothing so infuriates the prophets as such talk. When people shook their heads and looked back wistfully at the past, and murmured sadly in what they took

to be a pious key, "Ah, how wonderful God used to be! But now, of course, it is all different, all small and mean, and we live in tame, petty days." "Stop it!" the prophets cried, yes, and laid violent hands on them, and shook them. "Stop it! That's not religion: that's sheer blasphemy. God is alive! And, if you will admit Him, in our day, too, He will burst in, and work for us such wonders as will make the very greatest of the past fade from our minds, lost in the infinitely vaster glories we shall see!" And it is true. Whenever we give Him any chance at all He takes it. He saved me; that is well: but infinitely better, He is saving me; no memory, but the surest and most blessed of facts; a present help who day by day suffices and prevails and triumphs for me now.

And so it ought to be in our own lives. But is it so? Once on a day you did walk with Christ upon the heights, did meet Him face to face, did pledge yourself to make all things in your life according to the pattern shown to you on the mount. And you did mean it, for, as Seneca said sadly enough, "I did make a good beginning." The first communion! That day some dear one was snatched back from death! That other when a little one was born to very you! How you swore vows, and meant them. And yet what has come of it all? Ah, me! There have been haughty and imperial cities that ruled half the world; and now only the desert sand blows idly where their glories used to stand; and where there was the hum and murmur of their crowded streets only the desert silence broods unbroken. It has all vanished! There were once beauty spots in England. But a ghastly eczema of horrible brick houses broke out over their fair face; the lovely earth was churned into a muddy batter; no green thing can flourish in the poisonous fumes. It is all gone! And your heart used to have its dreams and its enthusiasms and its high adventures. And where are they now? Are they, too, gone? Have they, too, vanished like a dream? Is all the splendour changed into a poor, con-

ventional, flabby thing, you who once walked with Christ! I know He used to save you. But what of to-day? Is your religion only a memory, or still a fact? If in that temple of the living God that is your soul the flags that hang there are all old and dusty and faded and tattered; if all the dates on them point back to long ago, if there is never a victory to chronicle this year, nor any recent triumph to be added, then be sure that there is something far amiss. It is not so with me, says Paul, but day by day Christ, my wonderful Christ, becomes ever more wonderful, effects ever more striking triumphs for me, keeps astonishing me with all my knowledge of Him, so that day by day I have to take down even my boldest thoughts of Him and build them better on an ampler plan. He saved me; He has always saved me; and blessed be His name, He does it still, more and more marvellously every day.

And so he turns to face the future, whatever it may bring, with a heart quiet and unafraid. As time goes on that is not always easy. In youth, of course, the future is a land of golden dreams. It beckons; it haunts; it is beyond the horizon yonder that the best all lies. We are impatient to sail on and out of these grey, tumbling, native seas into the glories of the sunnier climes that lie ahead. But, by and by, the future is more apt by far to take than give. We have received our portion; a goodly one, as we acknowledge gratefully; and we are fain to settle down upon it, and enjoy it. Ah! but we can't! Why will the waters run so fast? Why do days heap themselves so swiftly into years? Why do dear faces grow so old? At best our loved ones must soon scatter now, and leave us in an echoing solitude; at any moment some grim terror may burst in and take from us what makes our life; we ourselves must expect within ourselves the fading of the summer glories, dwindling powers, a narrowing circle, the inexorable dulling down of life into a sober thing, and pain, and death to face, and that not far off now, but all quite near, a few years more at most.

On the night before war was declared, Sir Edward Grey, watching a lamplighter at work along the Mall, let slip, more to himself than to his companion, "The lamps are going out all over Europe: and we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime."

In most lives there comes a time when the lights, quite suddenly perhaps, go out. And once out, they can never be rekindled. And it takes some courage to hold on with cheerfulness; not to grow peevish and impatient, like a petted child whose own innings is over, and who won't play any more.

Moreover, our hearts are so frail, and the world is so deadly, so persistent in its enmity, can drag us down, God pity us, on to the very end!

"Oh!" mused à Kempis, looking out upon this dangerous life, "if only I knew I would hold out to the last." And his own soul rose up and answered him with scorn. Look back, it cried. Has God ever failed you in the past? And he said, No! Look round you. Is He overlooking you to-day? And he still answered, No. And don't you know that that same God who has been, and who is, so evidently sufficient, will be with you every step on to the end, always as gloriously sufficient for you then as now? I had forgotten that, the saint confessed: and it did make my fears look foolish! He will be with you also all the way—that faithful God—every morning when you waken, to the old intolerable pain; at every mile of the hot, uphill, dusty road of tiring duty; on to the Judgment Seat, the same Christ there as ever, still loving, still sufficient for you even then; aye, and on through eternity. "They are with Christ," we say, in that most marvellous of tributes to Him; and since He is there, why, all is well with them and us who trust them to Him.

During the War a party of journalists were taken into Verdun. They were met outside the town, says Mr. Spender, by an officer "who made us an elegant little speech in the

Gallic manner." "Gentlemen, the French Republic considers that the highest honour it can pay its guests is to take them into Verdun. But, gentlemen, I should add, that the French Republic cannot guarantee to take them out."

But God does guarantee to bring us through whatever lies before us, not without wounds perhaps, but with honour unsullied and hearts unafraid, and souls, if pain there is to bear, not shattered by it, but the braver for it.

He saved me, says Paul; He is saving me; and I trust in Him for the hope that He will save me. Is not that last a finely heartening phrase, as if to say—at times my hands grow numb and I lose grip of Him, but even then His hands still hold me: at times my foolish heart staggers in unbelief, but always He re-proves to me the best is really true by evidence from my own life that even in my dowiest moods I cannot challenge. For this hope is like Tintoretto's, not a young, flighty thing, but old, experienced, grey-haired, with eyes that have seen all there is to see, and a mind that knows all there is to know, and a heart that has passed through all that there is to bear, and still hopes on, surer than ever every day.

I don't think you need be afraid of life. For, look behind you, and about you, and before you, always there is God; a God who never fails, who does exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think, who makes our boldest faith in Him look drab and paltry and how trivial.

And mind you, says Paul, I am building not upon mere dreams and hopes and theories, but on the patent and indisputable facts of my own daily life!

II

GOD AND THE ORDINARY MAN

"I am not worthy."—GEN. xxxii. 10; MATT. viii. 8; LUKE xv. 21.

THAT is a phrase that occurs several times in Scripture. And, so far as I remember, upon each occasion, except one that we shall not forget, it betokens that an ordinary man like you and me has found himself confronting God; stands there, breathless, abashed, very humble, suddenly grown conscious how crude his life is, how unworthy his whole character; yes, and determined upon better things. And it is worth noticing that this tense sense of God, this salutary shame, this inrush of new understanding that far more is due from him than he has ever even tried to give—this higher mood common to them all, is wakened by very different things in different minds.

There at once is a lesson we are slow to learn—this, namely, that God's ways are not stereotyped, that He deals with each of us at first hand and upon an original plan, that you are not asked to reproduce any other's experience, but simply to come to Him through your own. There you are, obstinately you; it may be with a mind that is unblushingly interested in much you notice patently spiritual people just ignore; or with a nature which you find stubbornly won't be anything but rather bored by what makes them happily excited. And so, in a disheartened way, you conclude that you don't belong to the religious type, and push the whole thing from you as evidently not for you who are not built for it. But there is no one set religious type. Rather there ought to be as many ways of being healthily and naturally

religious as there are people in the world. You can quite safely start from this assumption that God's hands did not slip and bungle when He was creating you, so that in place of the more primly pious nature He had in His mind, there grew to actual being your very different rough-and-ready personality. It was you He wanted, the you of His own dream, of course, and not the chipped and broken thing you have blundered into fashioning. And yet, as Browning says, "my business is, not to remake myself; but to make the absolute best of what God made." To be religious one does not need to strain and contort oneself into a fixed and conventional pattern of character that for some of us would be an unreal pose. With Jesus and with God we can be absolutely natural. "Every one was more himself for being in the company of Shakespeare," says Raleigh in a wonderful tribute. But how much apter it is about Jesus Christ. For, as He Himself declared, it is only when a man turns toward God that he "comes to himself" and develops his real being. If you have ever had any fellowship with God at all, you must have discovered this at least, that holy though He be, with Him nobody is ever made to feel shy and gawky and out of his element, a kind of person with whom He has nothing in common. It is never the least like as when at some reception one is left for a moment with a great man; and he yawns and fidgets, and does not try to conceal that we are incredibly uninteresting, and that he is only putting in time he finds deadly dull, until a merciful providence drifts him against some one worthier of his attention, some one for whom even now his eyes are anxiously searching while he politely fails to attend to what we say. Always it is in the very spirit of that Christ who was so curiously interested in folk with whom we would have thought He would not bother; some of them, like Lazarus, so unimpressive and colourless that no human being could remember a single word they ever said, or anything they ever did. And yet Jesus "loved Lazarus," blank nonentity though some would

have judged him to be. For Christ had always time for awkward or for commonplace or for impossible people whom others did not notice, time that was apt to heap itself up into hours; as on that tiring day sitting on that hot well-head in Samaria, or on that other when He caught sight of a face peering at him through the branches, and felt that He would like to have not merely a brief talk, but a long evening with that man. And if any one at all goes to God, hot-faced at what he feels to be an unwarrantable intrusion, shame-facedly sure that he is not the person for this kind of thing at all, always He, too, lets us see that He is hugely interested in us, that He finds something likeable about us, that He would be really glad to have us as a friend. The fact is there are many roads that run to the Holy City; and pilgrims, travelling in diametrically opposite directions, shouting confident warnings to the others that they have gone far astray and, ridiculously enough, are facing quite the wrong way, will, to their amazement, find themselves at last together at God's feet. And each of us must take the road that runs past his own door, can offer only what he has to give, and need not fidget nor grow flurried if his gift is less than, or is different from, what others round him are presenting. In our religion resolutely we must be ourselves; must start, as Emerson says, from this—that we must "take ourselves as our portion."

The first time we hear this cry, "I am not worthy!" it bursts from the heart of Jacob—not at all a religious man, you will agree, though in his youth, like most of us, he had at times seen visions, and dreamed dreams, and felt the unseen very real and near. But, as too often happens, for him that had died away in those terrible flat levels of middle life. "I see," as Wordsworth says, "by glimpses now, when age comes on may scarcely see at all." And, subsequently, all God's ingenuity and all the cunning discipline of things had failed to make any lasting impression on Jacob's queerly composite, but mainly sordid mind.

"God and the devil," notes Bunyan of a character of his, "pull for his soul." But in Jacob's case that seemed all over, and the world had definitely won, as you and I would judge. For we read chapter after chapter in the centre of his life, and find ourselves in a squalid atmosphere, face to face with a man keen and alert concerning his own interests; by no means scrupulous; cheated at times, and himself on occasion cheating others without hesitation; a man rather crudely boastful of his own shrewdnesses, and yet a little soured because life has not given him all that he feels to be his due. There is much talk of flocks and herds and worldly plans and astute moves; but of God hardly a word. Newman declared that to gaze out on the world jostling and shoving eagerly about its own affairs, with not one trace of God in all its thoughts, gave him the same feeling as if he had looked in a mirror and not seen his own face. We shall look long enough into these central years of Jacob's life before we catch a glimpse of God. For him He has just faded out.

And then suddenly something happens. A cloud gathers, and throws a long, cold, shivery shadow. What he had won is jeopardized. And as he looks at his threatened possessions, he sees them all in a new light, and stands there dumb, awed, almost frightened, face to face with God once more.

And mark you, what brought that about was in its first beginning no spiritual cataclysm, no deep happening in his soul, but just a sudden recognition of the sheer goodness of God; of how, forgotten, He remembers and keeps heaping gifts with prodigal hands upon our undeserving. Jacob had not noticed that before. Like most of us he had lived largely from day to day, busy and interested about many things, had taken a good deal for granted, had supposed his own cleverness to be the source of most that mattered, and so had drifted on from year to year. And now something had made him turn and look back at the steep way he had

come, from that day long ago when he had splashed through Jordan, with nothing in the world to call his own but the stick in his hand—behind him only rage and enmity, before him only emptiness and friendlessness, and he alone there in a great, wide, heedless world, to whom it did not matter one whit what became of him ;—watched how through all the years since then God had remembered him, and helped him, and done marvels for him day by day, had brought him somehow safely to that hour. "God," says Emerson, "enters into every life by a private door." And the wicket through which he slipped into Jacob's was no tremendous spiritual experience (that came later), but just a wondering recognition of God's faithful kindness day by day. For Jacob, once he saw, never forgot. That moment made a lasting mark upon his heart and mind. From that day on, the thought of God was never far away from him. He was no saint, was never a proficient in these holy things, was to the end a plain man leading a plain life, like most of us. But that blank in his soul is gone. For God is there, the background of his being all his latter years.

Now is there not there a method by which some of us, too, might come into touch with Him, and that entirely naturally ; a way by which religion might become real for some to whom, as things are, it is not. For, decent people although they may be, they know that they are not religious. And that because, as they understand it, the thing simply does not appeal to them. Stephen Gwynne, for one, says bluntly that both Christianity and music leave his mind untouched and cold. He does not attempt to deny that they open up wonderful vistas to others ; all he knows is that for him they mean nothing at all.

And there are many people who look at religion and turn away, feeling that this is not their line of country, that in that whole region of things they are very far from home, and out of place, and altogether ill at ease. Frankly, they don't like prayer ; grow fidgety almost at once. Reading

a detective story rushes them on and on through breathless hours, but Paul's epistles are a dull duty to be put through doggedly if they open them at all, which is unlikely. Like Loisy's father, "they hold their tongue about religion because it has nothing to say to them." Indeed, the whole thing seems to their minds a little strained and unhealthy, and shall we say hot-housey? When you ask them to sing the great evangelical hymns they do so awkwardly, feeling in an unhappy way that they are using rather gross exaggeration, heaping up words to God without much accuracy of meaning. For, in hard fact, such tremendous confessions as these are foreign to their minds. They don't feel what they are being made to say they feel; and they resent it. No such deeps really call to deeps within the shallow sunlit waters of their souls. Rather they know themselves to be happy-hearted and well-meaning people, who find life very good and full of interest, and whose consciences, rightly or wrongly, don't bother much about their stumbles. And if this over-exposed thing (so they express it), far too blackly shadowed as they think, is religion, well, frankly, they don't like it, and don't agree with it, and don't want it. To them it seems, for them at least, a bit unnatural; and they leave it alone, and live without God in the world, because they feel they have no link with Him.

Just what that aloofness means, it is not easy to determine. Certainly it looks as if it had something sinister and small about it, as if such souls were not as yet fully developed. Assuredly it is pathetic that any one should be satisfied without the best and biggest we are meant to have, content to be mere crawling grubs that won't change into butterflies, won't take the inheritance that comes to them by right! So limited are our human faculties, says Sir Oliver Lodge, that we are here in this bewildering universe of ours for all the world like "a dog in a picture gallery, interested only in smells and corners," missing all the best. And Christ stares in astonishment at us, with no response

apparently within us for the real glories of life. To have the chance of knowing God and lose it!

And yet is there not in the mood we have described an honesty that Christ may well approve, a careful sincerity that won't use words without meaning them, won't offer more than it really has to give, won't pose and posture and pretend? In any case, is there not here for such a plain unspiritual man the link with God that he requires: and a religion that for him, too, is entirely natural, with not a touch of strain or sham or make-believe about it? For are you also never taken aback by God's faithful kindness; or what is the same thing by the fullness and the happiness of life? Are you never, like Stevenson, fairly staggered by it, till it seems a shocking thing to pray for more? Do you never, like a greater saint, hold up your unworthiness to God in confusion, feeling there must be some mistake? And in particular, do you never want some one to thank for it all? "I am not worthy!" Who of us is? For think out even a few of the gifts He heaps on us so lavishly—this glorious earth, the hush of evening woods, the scent and listening silence of the sun-baked moors, the wistful crying of the curlews, the ever-changing glories of the heavens, the steadfastness of hills, the witchery of the flowers, the depth and the distance and the music of the waters, home and dear ones, the glorious glow of health, books and music, friends and love, work with its fascination to a sane mind, and leisure with its thronging interests, our own exalted place high up the scale of being, the senses, each of them another avenue that leads far out into another world of mystery and beauty, our minds, ours just because God willed it so, and our affections that so fascinated Muhammad (for, said he, what if we had been created cold as snakes with no such natural drawing to each other?); our consciences, that strange, august, imperious voice; the fact that we can look "before and after," aye, and up; that greatest of the three which Shakespeare clean forgot, but

which the writer to Diognetus, a plain Christian man, remembered, "To us alone He gave the privilege of looking upward to Himself." Surely you feel ours is a splendid life, surely it must thrill and delight you! Well, meet God there! Bring Him as your sacrifice your joy in life. That does not cut you off from Him, as you suppose. That is for you the shortest route by which to reach Him. To Tertullian it is an irreligious thing to scorn this wonderful earth; not to enjoy our Father's tireless and ingenious bounty, and go running happily to Him about it. It was Goodness, Goodness, Goodness that made it all, he cries. Goodness, he says, that thought out the roses, aye, and the beauties of the wayside flowers; Goodness that fashioned these myriads of shells upon the beach so cunningly; Goodness that painted the feathers of the moor fowl. "Who," cries a Christian writer even older, thinking of things far deeper, "who of us would ever have expected these things?" And yet all of them are ours. Let God see here is one child of His at least that frankly loves this Father's house in which it finds itself, aye, and the heart that planned and gave it all. For that, too, is a very real religion. "It is a comely fashion to be glad. Joy is the grace we say to God," is in its essence a spiritual thing.

It is little to offer Him, you say. It is. But it is more than most of us are giving Him. Goethe, for his part, tells us with blunt honesty that he felt no gratitude towards God, but rather a sense of grievance, because He kept awakening longings in him that He did not satisfy. I imagine many are like that, though we don't set it down in words. For these little hearts of ours are immeasurably greedy, and our desires seem unappeasable. And we have an odd way of heaping up a mass of mercies, each of which, to those who have it not, would, so they feel, make life a glory. But we sweep them into a careless heap, and think nothing about them all, accept them dully as a thing of course, feeling that less would be

outrageous, and that for this bare minimum we owe God nothing at all.

Amid the clamour of dissatisfaction round His Mercy Seat there may well be something grateful to God in your simple little offering of a heart, not spiritual, not deep nor Christlike in the fuller sense, but at least at one with Him in this that you are happy—for our Lord was very happy and says so—and that you want to tell the God who planned it for you that you find the life He gave you very good, if that is not too humble an offering to bring into His holy place. Believe me, it is not. Jacob was never a devout and saintly soul, and yet not many names are given God so often as the God of Jacob. And with you, too, plain, ordinary, inexpert in this whole region although you may be, He is content to link His name, if you will bring Him what you have and can. Because, as Paul says, we are not asked to offer what we have not got. God is not guilty of that human unreasonableness.

Again, this phrase, "I am not worthy," twice breaks from men finding themselves face to face with Jesus Christ, and stunned by this amazement that has come into their lives. Of John the Baptist—no ordinary man, but a spirit so mighty that he awoke admiration even in our Lord—I do not propose to speak, save to say this, that he provides one more proof of the fact that the bigger a soul is, the humbler does it feel in Jesus' presence. "'Tis the taught already that profit by teaching," remarks Browning; it is those who know something about a subject who can see the genius of a master in it; and it is those who have made some progress in the art of living life and in knowledge of God who stand staring dumb with wonder at the splendour of Christ. It is indeed an ill sign that we can take Him so lightly, you and I. For if it is sheer tragedy that people lose Him so easily, stumbled by some petty doubt or difficulty that lies far out on the surface of things, throwing away all they might have because of such a stupid little nothing, still more amazing is it surely

that we can accept Him so coolly, can believe that this is true, yet be so little moved by it, can take it as a thing of course, can grow so accustomed to it that we yawn through the story of the gospel. "Not much in that sermon to-day! No; deadly dull; the same old theme we have heard till we are tired!" And yet the man was speaking of the Cross of Christ! Paul took this gift of God into his hands and gazed at it, feeling there are no words to express it; that there is no sense in God treating us like this; that, judged by human standards stretched out to their cracking-point, it just cannot be true. And yet, and yet, it is true; true that after all the failure and the inexcusable past God does love us, and does trust us, and does believe in us like this; and the man is so deeply moved that we look up surprised at him. "Well, why not?" we ask, not staggered in the least. As Rainy said, "We preach it, and believe it in a way, but we no longer wonder at it in our hearts." When Peter saw Christ's glory he cried out, "Depart from me," and even the Baptist shrank back, almost coweringly. "I am not worthy to unloose His shoes," he said. But you and I take all Christ is, and all Christ does, and all Christ offers, as the merest thing of course. As Keats says of science, peering and poking and, to him, spoiling, by an unwise pushing into the mysteries of things:

> "There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:
> We know her woof, her texture; she is given
> In the dull catalogue of common things."

And Christ's Cross too is there far down "in the dull catalogue of common things." When the boys first went to the front they were much struck by the Calvaries at the cross-roads; but by and by they grew accustomed to them, never noticed them, went whistling past upon their careless way. And we too take our Lord for granted now, are not surprised by anything He does or says or is. And yet if even Christ has grown commonplace, if even the Cross does

not arrest and lay compulsion on us any longer, what is there left for God to try?

But I would speak rather of that other, the blunt soldier who so cheered the Master—again not a spiritual expert, just an ordinary man out in the dust and rush of things, like you. He was indeed a kindly soul—witness his goodness to his servant—and, even in those days of cold brutality, a man of a large sympathy for the subject people among whom he was quartered. "He is worthy," they kept urging upon Christ, "for he loves our nation and has built us a synagogue." But he himself thought otherwise, and had no doubt about it; felt that he, a product of the camp and field and the rough life of the army, had no fitness to meet Jesus Christ. He had tried to play the game and do his bit. But Christ could have no sense of kinship with one who moved in his lower, dustier world. Face to face with Him, he would be sure to blunder and make a mess of it, would feel out of place, would offend with his blunt tongue, would shock Him by the whole tone of his mind. Better not go at all, he felt, already half-way there, and turned and sent a message. That was safer.

Perhaps you too feel that. You are not spiritual. You live in the rush and press of things, sordid material things, and must live there. And though you do look toward Christ with admiration, you feel that with a plain, prosaic soul like you He can have no real friendship. Well, you are wrong. I am quite sure that it is a mistake to talk about the apostles and disciples as Saint this and that. Because that fosters the idea that, while Christ could make something of such august souls, even He cannot be expected to do anything with our drab ordinariness. And yet the Twelve were very ordinary men—not in the least like what they look in stained-glass windows, but very human—John with his temper, and Peter scared into hot oaths, and Thomas lagging so far behind that he could hardly keep our Lord in sight, wait for him how Christ might. And yet these men were very dear to Christ, and He

owed very much to them, as He Himself told God, looking at them the while with eyes shining with gratitude. And you and I could be far more to Him, and do far more for Him, than we have ever realized. What under God mainly keeps the Church in being? The services? Not anything like so much as that mothers, very ordinary women, hot and rushed and tired, make time in their too full days (and indeed a very little time will do) to teach the wee ones stories about Jesus, and to show them how to pray. Just that. And that plain men, who find it difficult to talk about these things, and do not count themselves really religious, live straight and cleanly and unselfishly, and all unknowing set a standard for their boys that they cannot forget. Just that. Open the Gospels and you will see how much Christ owed to simple souls who hadn't much to give, but who gave what they had—a kindly greeting, a bit of faith, a trembling touch, a word of gratitude, a little hospitality—and Christ went on His way much cheered. And we could do that too. We owe our Scottish freedom to the fact that at the crisis of the battle the camp followers came rushing down the hill to fling themselves into the thick of it, whereat the enemy, thinking this a new army, broke and fled. Just what these unarmed menials meant to do against mailed knights and the terrible archery of England even they perhaps had not a notion. Only they couldn't keep out of it, could die at least, and so encumber the hostile advance by their dead bodies, piled in heaps. And doing what they could, poor futility though it looked, they have left a tremendous mark on history, and saved a nation's soul. And if we did for Jesus what we could, we plain, unspiritual, ordinary folk, what would there not result?

Surely it is a very striking thing that at the most solemn moment of the Mass, when the soul of the Church, moved to its depths, cries out to Christ, it finds expression for its inmost feelings in whose words out of all the Scriptures? Not in the deeps of Paul's theology; not in the mysticism of

John's soaring mind ; not even in the hope and remembrance and love of Peter ; but in the abashed cry of this plain man. He who, conscious of his ordinariness, shrank from the Master's presence has been chosen by that Master out of all His Church to lead innumerable others, even the greatest and most spiritual, into the very hush and secret of the Presence, where souls see Him all but face to face. " It is the centurion who has marked the Mass with his ' Domine, non sum dignus,' " says Paul Bourget. " The soldier's words are repeated daily at the altar of the priest before the communion. The Army has the last word at the Holy Sacrifice." And that is but a symbol of what ordinary men can be and do for Jesus Christ.

Lastly, these same words, " I am not worthy," are the very cry with which the soul-sick and repentant prodigal turned back to his father—again a very ordinary man, who had made a sad mess of things, and knew it to his shame. I am told, indeed, that this side of Christ's teaching is no longer true to life or human nature as it now exists, but is as out of date and as quaintly old-fashioned as the prim, angular drawing of the old Egyptians or the uncouth script of ancient Babylon. It is thirty years and more since we were assured in the now threadbare phrase that nobody is worrying about his sins, and every year since then the evidence for that has been growing into a thundering avalanche. Only the other day Miss Chilcott, of Lady Margaret Hall at Oxford, who ought to know the young life of to-day, discussing the theory of the Atonement built up upon those solemn words, " He was wounded for our transgressions," remarks, as if it were a thing of course, " To the younger generation it is not only immoral but meaningless, because the younger generation does not believe in ' sin.' It believes in folly and futility, meanness and blindness : and, equally, that if any redemption of these things is possible it must be by our own pain." So that is all that we have learned through some three-quarters of a million of boys dying for

us! O laddies, in your foreign graves, some of us know better! "Perhaps," she adds a little pertly, "belief in sin is a prerogative of the old and wise and optimistic." And one who has made a long study of youth at happily close quarters, giving his findings upon their religious views, declares they do believe in prayer, greatly in thanksgiving, truly in intercession, even a little in petition, but in confession not at all—again because they are not bothering about their sins.

And yet I wonder if these confident opinions are quite justified. It is difficult to be sure. For human nature, as the centuries go by, tends to become ever more reserved and shy concerning the deep things. The strong silent man of long ago is largely a pure myth, or a wide generalization from selected individuals. In those old days the House of Commons was at times oddly emotional, bursting into a flood of tears, quite unimaginable now. When a man gave himself to God, he was likely to do it by means of a formal covenant, with its provisions all set down at length with a legal precision, whereas to-day he would slip his hand quietly into Christ's, and say little about it. A death-bed used to be almost a public function, a spiritual clinic to which gaping students of the soul crowded and stood watching and whispering and taking notes, a pulpit from which one was supposed to give his testimony. To-day we count it less than seemly so to beset the passing of a soul to God. We are far shyer, and it is not easy to compare folk so unlike. But even if the fact be as alleged, may there not be two possible explanations? If our mood really is an apathy that does not feel the shame of being besmirched, if it means we are too low in the scale to have a developed conscience, or else that ours is so crude and primitive a god that it does not matter to him how we live, then may the real God in His infinite grace have mercy on our souls! But may it not be simply that we have learned to take God at His word, and to believe what He says? When our Lord sought for the

type of what He wished in us, He found it in a little child. And though a child can be wide-eyed with wonderment and immensely excited, it can at times receive astonishing things with a simple and unquestioning trustfulness, a complete lack of surprise that takes aback and disconcerts. After all, the old-time doubts and hesitations to close with God's offered forgiveness, those wonderings whether it was really meant for me, were not religious, but just lack of faith. As Shakespeare says :

> " I hold it cowardice
> To rest mistrustful where a noble heart
> Hath pawned an open hand in sign of love."

It was not fair to doubt God after Calvary. And if we are past that, and take it now with a child's simplicity and even a child's thoughtlessness, there is real danger in that mood, but also real advance. Indeed, it is not wise psychology to brood over one's sins. Far better look up hopefully into the Saviour's face. " Hermas," said the angel, " cease praying for your sins ; pray for righteousness, and you will have a portion of it in your house at once."

In any case there are still lives in plenty where the old facts still stare at us, precisely as Christ pictured them ; still many hearts that find their stumbling way to God by the hard road of the prodigal, or at least through loss of self-respect, through the unhappy knowledge that they have failed, have not made of life what they should and could have done. An evil conscience is not an old-world memory but a grim fact. We may murder our self-respect and fling it out of sight, and laugh and sing, but one day, please God, the dead thing will rise and haunt us ; will break in, like Banquo, on our revels and sit staring at us with its stony eyes. And then —what then ? Better that terror than to have it shovelled out of sight in a forgotten grave.

> " Oh, dreadful is the check, intense the agony,
> When the ear begins to hear, and the eye begins to see,

When the pulse begins to throb, the brain to think again—
The soul to feel the flesh, and the flesh to feel the chain.

Yet I would lose no sting, would wish no torture less;
The more the anguish racks, the earlier will it bless,
And robed in fires of hell, or bright with heavenly shine,
If it but herald death, the vision is divine."

Yes; if it mean the death of the old sordid ways, and rising to a new and better life, however it hurts, let it come. When the sunset glory flames out in the skies, the cattle never lift their heads, but stolidly munch on. Yet in you it creates a wistfulness, half melancholy and half pain, but all a glory. And would you be rid of that, sunk in bovine placidity?

"O God!" cries Hamlet, "I could be bounded in a nutshell, and count myself the king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams." Thank God for them! For you are not an insect to be satisfied with a cramped meagreness, are meant for infinite things.

O miserable, happy soul, whose misery is your happiness, do you not understand? That summons pealing through your life is not a boding doom, it is a pierced Hand that is knocking on your door! That darkness that has fallen across your life is Jesus' shadow, and just because it is so dark, He must be very near; and when Christ comes at all, it is to save. That heartache is home-sickness for the God for whom you were created, and who is your natural home. Arise, and go, and fling yourself upon your Father's grace, not seeking to evade punishment, not pleading to get off, leaving all that to Him, and asking only that He will not exile you to this horrible life you chose, will find some way to make some use even of you, to let you prove you do repent, are done with the old grossnesses, would serve Him in the poor, maimed way that you still can. And you will find the door is open, and the welcome warm and sure; that, while you are a great way off, the Father will see you and come running to you, eager to gather to His arms the shabby,

muddied thing you are, making you feel how He has missed you, and the difference it is to Him to have you safely back—yes, and that His wise hands can piece together something not quite useless even out of your poor, broken life. O happy soul! for there are those who to the end loll at their ease among the trampled mud about the troughs, and glut themselves upon the husks that the swine leave to them, and think, poor fools, that that is life, and are content. But you are sick of it, are haunted by a voice that calls and calls, seeking for some one it has lost, some one whom it must find. And it is your name it keeps calling. Rise and go. And if you dare not, still you hear how it grows more distinct, that pleading voice, draws nearer and yet nearer, is at your very side. For, not content with watching and waiting and hoping, God has followed into the far country, and has come to seek and save that which was lost, and you too He has found. "Father, I am not worthy." But you also He has interrupted with that glad, masterful, appropriating cry that blots out and begins afresh, "My son! my son!"

III

WHAT SHALL WE CHOOSE FROM LIFE?

"A tree of fruit is Joseph, a fruit tree by a well, the branches covering the walls. Archers bitterly assail him, shoot at him savagely, but his own bow remains steady, and he nimbly plies his arms; Jacob's mighty one upholds him, Israel's strength sustains him; ay, your father's God who aids you."—GEN. xlix. 22–25 (Moffatt).

JOSEPH was the favourite son. And be sure that into the inheritance sketched out for him was crowded all an old man's fondness. It is as if the aged patriarch, propped up there in bed—this old, shrewd man who had seen all that there is to see, and travelled the whole round of human experience—took this many-sided life of ours into his thin and shaking hands, and felt it over, and turned it round and round, seeking the very best it has to offer for the man that he loved most. And when at last he makes his choice, it reveals an unexpected bigness of character in a somewhat mean and shabby soul. It is as if, as sometimes happens, the flame leapt high, and then the fire was out. You young folk with your life still in your hand, yours yet to give away for what you choose, what do you mean to buy with it? And in determining that, be sincere with yourselves, remembering that God may lay aside your formal prayers—what you say to Him when upon your knees, not indeed consciously dishonestly, but slipping somewhat further into what you feel it to be the right and seemly thing to say when there than is perhaps quite true for you—and may judge you rather by your natural desires, the wishes that spring up spontaneously within you, the dreams to which your hearts keep breaking

away of themselves with shining eyes and eager, outstretched hands. What is it that you wish from life? What are you set on getting from it? And you older people, whose own lot is fixed by now, and who dream dreams, not for yourselves, but for those following after you, what do you covet for them most? If God definitely let you have your choice for them, if He held out the whole of the possibilities, if He said, looking at you, "Pick what you will," upon what would you lay your hand and answer "Give them that"?

Thinking back over his life, lying there as good as finished, Jacob felt drearily that in his own critical days he had allowed himself to be fooled. Never a tawdry booth in Vanity Fair but had caught his gaping yokel soul with its tinsel and its flares; never a raucous cheapjack, hoarse with shouting palpable lies, but had found in him a simple prey. And now, choosing again, he was not to be cheated so easily a second time. Gone are the sordid dreams of his own younger days, the dusty ambitions, the blind, breathless chasing, roughly elbowing others out of the way, of what he sees now matters very little. For he has learned that life has vastly better, bigger, braver things than these to give. And though that knowledge came too late to be of much use to himself, at least he could cry back a warning to those coming after him, telling them where the true path lies, and where the ground that looks so solid is a quaking bog; could put the book of his experience, written with his own hand, in theirs, and bid them learn from that authentic, first-hand document; could plead with them not to be beguiled into the simpleton's bargain into which he fell, aye, and with God to help them, to do more with life, the life He planned for them, than that. "I don't ask," he says, "that the lad should have a soft and sheltered lot, full of success and comfort; I don't hope for that, don't want it for him. For in the quiet of a land-locked haven the waters are apt to heave foul and scummy, with all manner of nastinesses gathered together on their fat and lazy oiliness. It is out in the open sea, with

one's breath blown away, and the spray stinging in one's eyes, and the huge billows battering down upon the decks till the ship shudders and staggers like a hurt thing, that there are health and cleanness and adventure to be found. I ask for no immunity from the fierce buffeting of Fate, no tame escape, letting this weakly thing slip past, no shielding of him from the dangers and the wounds of the high places in the field. Let him be exercised with difficulties ; let him have his whole fair share of trouble to face and pain to bear ! For these things should endow his soul with grit and hardihood, and otherwise it might grow soft and flabby and degenerate. The ordering of things I leave to Thee, claim for him only this—Grant him a brave heart that can face life at its darkest unafraid, and such a sense of God, his father's God, continually beside him, too near to be missed, too certain to be doubted, as must bring him through with gallantry and steady eyes. And, for the rest, Thy will for him be done." " The archers bitterly assail him, shooting at him savagely." What matter, " if his own bow remains steady, if he nimbly plies his arms, if Jacob's Mighty One upholds him, if Israel's Strength sustains him," if he himself plays the man, and is upheld by God ?

Did you ever think of asking that ? It is not a popular prayer. Plato tells us how once men were given another chance ; and this time the choice of his lot in life was left for each one to make for himself. There was a suffocating press and almost a free fight about the kingships and high offices. But the subtlest mind in the whole world turned from all that, and, stooping, eagerly picked up a life lying neglected and unwanted, that of a private man. And in all that surely unseemly clamour round the Mercy Seat, in that incessant babble of hot, insistent, emphatic desires so rudely blurted out and truculently thrust on God, how many have the chivalry and spiritual genius to choose Jacob's prayer ?

As far as one can gather, in our time the earthly paradise

of which we dream, the life that seems ideal to us, is a kind of South Sea island, in a pleasantly temperate clime, where we can all lie on our backs in the not too hot sunshine—God, of course, will have to see to that—and doze our idle lives away; where nobody will ever have to do anything except what everybody likes, where what we need will—Providence at long last having learned its obvious business—fall of itself into our idle laps, and our most tiring exertion will be sleepily to manage to stretch out a lazy hand. Ah! that would be real life. "And look at us," we add angrily, "look at us as we really are, so pinched and hot and tried and tired!" And with that we complain and grumble against God, and the simply appalling botch that He has made of things, railing at what we contemptuously call the crude and clumsy machinery of life, the pain, the suffering, the sorrow, the temptation, the whole preposterous business, feeling indignantly that this barbarically primitive plant is obsolete and must be scrapped.

And yet, as a man in Job puts it to a frenzied mortal raving at fate, something can be said for God! Yes, not a little. For my part I have no complaint to make against Him, even where His hands have hurt me most. Let us be reasonable. Not a doubt, if man is meant to be a fat and sluggish creature curled up at its ease like a caterpillar in a safe fold of a cabbage leaf, human experience has been ill planned. But if God's dream was, not of a poor, insignificant insect crawling in the mud and happy there, but of a mighty creature, daring in adventure, with valour and hardihood and a soul, how could these things have been wrought into being in us otherwise than as they were and are? Can you have courage without danger, or sympathy without suffering, or tenderness without weakness or pain? Can one gain strength of character except by facing odds and being disciplined by life? And if so, how? If you want the glory of human nature, then you must be prepared to pay the price for it. And if you for one are not, but shrink back, breaking

out into bleating whimpers of self-pity at the mere thought of that as so uncomfortable, slink away then to your native meanness! But don't judge others by your own cowardly soul. And do not be too sure that, even against your puling will, God in His mercy may not insist on striving to create some touch of heroism, splendour, soul, in that soft, lustreless mush of dullness that you are. And how can that be managed except in the one way? Even Christ was made perfect only through suffering. Even He became our Saviour only by the hard way of the Cross. And it is enough for the servant to be as his Lord.

When Rainy was a boy, his father told him, giving him a first lesson in life, that there had been certain things in his experience so sore that they seemed simply "intolerable," and yet, looking back, he saw that of all that had befallen him these were what he could not possibly have done without. And so it has been with humanity. It is only because man has battled in his frail craft with wild tumbling seas that he has won through to new and sunnier lands; only because his fingers have kept teasing at insoluble-looking problems knotted hard that he has gained his brain and his place in the world; only because he has had to wrestle in the grip of difficulty and temptation, with set teeth and sinews near the cracking, that he has grown great and strong. In Michel Angelo's wonderful Creation of Adam, with God's outstretched finger touching his, and a light beginning to dawn on the upturned, awakening face, there is inserted at the foot a shrinking, cowering figure, covering its head and in a passion of weeping. Weeping, you say, at the coming into being of that stately creature? Aye. For if the story of mankind has been a glorious epic, through what toil and suffering and agony it has won its slow, desperate, upward way. That is what followed the touch of God's finger. And if He touches you!——

There is a man of genius in the Old Testament who heard his fellows crying out against the hard ways of Pro-

vidence, as they are snivelling still, and, staring at them in amazement, he asked, But is it so difficult to understand? Look at that eagle's eyrie, he said, pointing to an inaccessible place far up among the frowning crags, where the untidy nest showed dimly visible. How safe the brood are there! For never a human foot can venture near their home. How easy is their life, with the devoted parents bringing them everything they need, and more! And yet, look yonder! And, indeed, before our very eyes the great birds are roughly shoving their own young, frightened, screaming, futilely resisting, nearer and nearer to the edge—and over! Ah! how horrible! For, look how the poor helpless things, beating their ineffectual wings, sink like a stone down, down to sickening, certain death! But no! For, with a swoop, the parent birds are underneath, spreading their own broad pinions to hide that yawning gulf from eyes crazy with fear; sinking as the other sinks, but always only a few inches lower; letting them rest a while on the broad, comfortable, familiar back when they are utterly tired, and then falling away once more, but never far, and always there; till by and by, the kindly cruel lesson over, both young and old are winging their majestically easy way back to the nest again. An hour ago the eaglet was immured upon a narrow ledge, evil smelling and littered with carrion. That was its entire world. But now it has the whole wide kingdom of the air, stretching out endlessly, to own and rule.

One must pay down the cost of progress every time. A month after my wife's sudden death I was held up for a moment in the centre of the congregation dispersing from a church where I had preached. "If," said a woman ahead of me, "I could believe what that man says, I would still make another try." "You can safely believe him," answered one far older, "that man knows; his wife is dead." And with that my heart stood still. For how often I had prayed that God would use me, thinking, I fancy, of a crowded

church and eager throngs. There are no crowds; only a darkness fallen over life. But is that God? Only a terrible soreness. And is that the answer, bringing at least the chance of an understanding that may help some other stricken hearts? "Now is My soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour? But for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify Thy name!" As for me, here am I. Do with me as Thou wilt. All that I ask is, use me for Thy glory. Dare you pray that? Take care. For God may hear you, and the answer for you too may be a cross. And if it prove to be so, what do you say then?

I don't want to get off, cries Browning (he was thinking of death), don't want to have my eyes bandaged, and creep past; don't want to be spared anything. Give me the whole of a man's lot, however sore. I don't want to get off, says Paul (he was thinking of life, which he felt to be a far more dangerous affair), let them all come—principalities and powers, the present hardships, the unknown that is lurking in the future waiting to stab as we stroll past—let them all come, and in Christ we will face them, aye, and be the better for them. I don't want to get off, says Mr. Masefield (he was thinking of his soul), watching a man ploughing, and the red earth being torn apart how cruelly by the hard, gleaming share. But if Christ holds the shafts, let my soul also be so ploughed—yes, deeper, deeper still! For so, please God, my bare life may in time be covered over with the rich gold of that harvest of righteousness which Christ dares to promise even to me. It is the glory of their constant weather that breeds that languor in the southern races, declares Kingsley, and our own bitter days that keep us energetic. And, with his face blue with cold and his whole body shivering under the sharp north-easter, he still greets it joyously. "Blow, thou wind of God!" I don't want my boy to have too soft a lot, prayed Jacob. Let the archers shoot at him and let him have to struggle through! And you?

All that must mean that this is a man who has won to

a different conception of life from ours, who has another ideal for it, another reading of what it is for. We think of it as ours, as given us to enable us to push our fortunes, to have a good time, to succeed, as we call it, and the like. It is our life; and we intend, of course, to spend it on ourselves. But it is not yours, says Jacob, it is God's; and it is given you, not for yourself at all, but that you may be helpful to your fellow-men. "I would I were an orange tree, that busy plant," sings one of our own poets. And here we have that same vivid metaphor, a vine heavily laden, covering the whole wall, each branch of it weighed down with clusters, and even running out far over the road, so that anybody passing can put out a hand and take, and go upon his way refreshed. That is what you and I are for: why you and I are here. Even this worldling, at the end of his own sordid and pushful days, saw clearly that was the one type of life worth living. Give the boy that, he prayed. And in their hearts even the Greeks, with all their passion for sunshine, entirely agreed. Hercules is an uncouth kind of hero, with his lion skin and knotted cudgel, yet down the ages men's eyes followed him admiringly as he went up and down, clumsily righting wrongs, boorishly helping people out of trouble. As Browning says, "He held his life out on his hand for any man to take." It was yours for the having. All that he was and all that he could do was there at your disposal: you had but to look to him. And in the Testament, as we watch Jesus Christ spending Himself so eagerly for any one, unable to keep out of other people's trouble, growing tired through carrying utter strangers' burdens, and all so happily and heartily and obviously finding it a real gladness to Himself, thankful indeed to folk we think rather impertinent for giving Him the opportunity—we know that that is life, real life, life as it should be lived. And yet we are not imitating it, not much, not closely, not where it would pinch. We can't be bothered; the cost is too heavy; always we keep slipping back into that old stupid fallacy that it is our life

and, of course, intended primarily to be spent upon ourselves, and that those other people are a nuisance and an intrusion. And yet Christ's way of it is not just a lovely thing out of a fairy story, not really to be looked for in this muddy, workaday world of yours. It is the test against which we are judged. We, too, must use our days like that. And believe me, declares Browning, when your life is over, and you lie looking back at it, it will seem a drab and dull and empty business for all its rush and bustle, and only here and there will your eyes light on something that gleams out. Yes, that was where you turned aside with helpfulness to some one else. And look! see for yourself—already all the rest is tarnished and has faded, and is dead, and only that blooms on. Let my son be like a vine, smothered in clusters, and with branches running out over the wall where any one can take.

Did you ever notice how much Jesus loved that touch of something extra in a life, that running out over the wall? Yes, you grumble, and how can I give it Him—I, planted down in a narrow place, in a set round of petty little drudgeries? Yet even there it can be done, and with enormous consequences. If working men would give not just a fair day's work, but added to that something extra, the old pride in what they do, a personal interest in the business that thinks of it proudly as their business, and doesn't mind a half-hour more upon occasion, would not that make all the difference, and bring in contracts that are being lost for lack of it, and lift us as a nation out of this dangerous time? And if employers gave, not just a fair day's wage, but added to that something extra, a touch of human interest and friendship, would not that ease many minds that, toil how they may, are never more than a few days or weeks ahead of grim possibilities that set their souls shivering, not for themselves so much as for their dear ones? And so in all our relationships. Let your branches run over the wall; fling in the extra with an eager hand. That is the Christ

touch, and our Lord's own way, and what He claims from you and me. "What do ye more than others?" He expects more, not just duty, but that and something added.

To the people of His own day, sore because of oppression, He urged, Do truculent soldiery lay violent hands on you, and hale you from your work, and make you fetch and carry for them, then go another mile, and so give a glistering of nobility to what would otherwise be a mere sullen surrender to brute force. And one pictures a carpenter laddie who had been commandeered some hot day when the troops couldn't be bothered carrying their own packs, and who had been so cheerful and friendly that He had made even their rough souls half ashamed. And to us in our time He is surely saying, In a day of industrial crisis, even if you are hot and tired after eight hours of work, throw in another for the people's sake; in these hard times, when things are dear, give more than a just wage, even if it does cut back your profits to the bone and mean a more straitened kind of life for you; with so many needy folk about you, pay out your income tax, not dourly and of necessity, but cheerfully, hailing the tax-collector, in the Apostle's bold phrase, as a minister of God, as one through whom, bewildered by the intricacy of our social problems, you may hope to do something really serviceable to your less fortunate fellows. Always it is the extra that alone suffices.

There is a well-worn gibe against an apocryphal countryman of mine, that as he gloomily picked up his money from the counter, he was asked, "Is your change not right, sir?" and replied morosely, "Yes; but just right." Well, that touches the sore. The difficulty is that it is not anything like enough to be just, though that seems all that we can offer; we are asked to love. And less than that means chaos. No doubt we can't pay more than twenty shillings in the pound; but we must live our life on just these prodigal and extravagant lines, if we would really enjoy it, and make adequate use of it. Fling it away, cries Christ. Don't hoard! don't keep! don't

grudge! fling it away! And we look at Him in astonishment, and slowly come to the conclusion that, of course, He does not mean it seriously. But He does. And the mistake that we keep making is that we will try to run this earth of ours in a mere huckstering way, cautiously paying down the exact amount, measured with meticulous care, for what has with an equally scrupulous accuracy been doled out, drop by drop. And things will never run happily until we learn something of God's enormous generosity, God who never thinks of His own profit, but only of what He can do for others; who does not bother about hours, but, as Christ said, works on and on, all day and every day, week day and resting day alike; who heaps up more on more, and grace on grace, and, sheer bewilderment on sheer bewilderment, is never satisfied to give only the minimum that will suffice. He makes a world, and though seen from His eternities it is only a shadow seen and gone, what infinite skill He lavishes upon it; He grants us life for seventy little years, and what a wonderful life it is, no bleached, lean, unappetizing thing that will pass muster, but gay with colour, crowded with endless interests; He thinks out a salvation for our most unworthy souls, and the angels stare at it, stunned and half incredulous, for He has thrown in all God's all, has given His most, His best, God's everything, for us. God, says James in a brilliant metaphor, is like the sun at high noon, always giving all He has. And I "would wear myself out," cries a character in Browning, "like that morn which wasted not a sunbeam."

There is a man in the Old Testament who tells us that he can make nothing of God's ways toward him, can see no sense in them at all. For He pays no attention to my gross unworthiness, and just ignores my inexcusable provokingness, and seems obstinately to forget all about my sin, insists on treating me as I do not deserve. And I can find no reason for it except this, that He likes doing it, that His delight is in mercy, and that He can never have enough of that. And He

expects that we, His children, will live after His own generous way, that our branches will not merely be primly trained in their due place, but that in a riot of liberality they will reach out far over the wall, and right across the road.

Gissing, that needy city sparrow, was staggered, on wandering into the country for the first time, by the lavishness of Nature, who gave him from her bramble bushes not merely a berry or two, as is man's niggardly way, but as much as he could wish, and all for nothing. And Christ tells us that He looks for something similar in us. I want you, He says, to be to others something of what you have found in Me. People are tired and thirsty, the staring sun beats down on their baked, shadowless life, dust-storms have blinded and half choked them, the sand beneath their limping feet feels hot as fire. In such case you have never found Me fail you. Don't fail them. As in Me you have come upon a well of cool and living water, see that in your heart there bubbles up another such at which they can refresh themselves, that in you they have one to whom they feel it matters, who is not outside it all but in it with them, who has a large and leisured sympathy that has time to attend to them and puts that first. They are so weary and dusty and foot-sore, these endless passers-by upon the hot, hard road, let your branches lean invitingly across the wall to them. And strange things will happen. Tagore says with assurance that once he saw, resting gratefully in the meagre shadow of his branches, a stranger, who yet somehow seemed familiar. He was grey with tire, for all day He had been out in the hot sun helping people, and Tagore at first did not recognize Him, and was passing carelessly on, when something made him turn his head to take a second glance, and his heart stood still, for he knew it was God! At all events, the Lord Christ will often pass your door; and it was ever His gracious way to stoop to be beholden to the queerest and most impossible people. He took gratefully from the soiled hands of the woman of Samaria, and He will take from yours, often

though they have stabbed Him. He went upon His way with His heart singing because of the crude faith of an importunate heathen creature; and any little broken bits of faith and trust and courage that you offer Him will make His face light up with happiness. Surrounded by a circle of dull souls who meant well, but had made the most prodigious muddle of it all, His heart saw only the intention that had come to next to nothing, yet was there; and His heart ran out to God in gratitude for them who, so He said, had, after God Himself, been far the biggest thing in His whole life. And when you come into His presence, ashamed to look Him in the eyes, feeling that you have been an utter failure and have nothing to bring home, "Thanks, many thanks," He will say eagerly to you, "for all you did, and all you were, and all the difference that you have made to Me and Mine!"

To be of use to Jesus Christ! What can we conceive to lay alongside that in our boldest day-dreams. And in His infinite condescension He has put that marvellous possibility within the reach of every one, even of you and me!

But there is a deeper thought still in Jacob's day-dream, a thought that tells of long experience and an intimate knowledge of these unstable hearts of ours. Out of all possible lives unhesitatingly he had chosen for his favourite, not ease, not comfort, not success, but helpfulness. Yet he knew well that if his son was to accept and live out that proud destiny, and really put his days to those high ends, he would require some constant inspiration, some sure and perennial source of idealism, something to sting him out of lesser ways, or else inevitably he would in time fall into step with the conventions round him, be dragged down to the standards of the common herd, forget his dreams, and end by putting through his life as cheaply and as tamely as the rest. Let him be like a vine. Aye, but vines wither in the breathless swelter of the midday heat. And if this life is to be green and fruitful when others fade, and brown,

and die, through that terrible mid-time of life when so many souls fall out and perish, it must be near a spring whose waters will come seeping through the hot, dry, dusty earth, and find its roots, and keep it fresh and vigorous. And that is true. As Browning has it, "the real God function," what we need God for most, is not to show us what our lives should be, nearly so much as "to furnish a motive" for doing what we know already, to push us over into the actual living of it out, to keep us at that day by day. We must have something that lays compulsion on us to be what in our hearts we quite agree we ought to be and yet that we are not, something so haunting that it won't be forgotten, so strong that we can't resist it, and so persistent that there is no possible escape. Many things can do that for us in measure. But religion has been far the most efficient. And nothing in any religion has proved to have anything like such masterful power as the Cross of Jesus Christ. Stand upon Calvary, and look at it for yourself. There, where you are now, is the spot where more souls have been won for God than anywhere else. Somehow that grim thing grips the heart; it calls, and one has got to go; it lays on us compelling hands that won't shake off. Do you feel nothing? Jesus thought you would, was sure you must, believed that no one could stand there unmoved. And are you too petty a thing to feel the thrill of it? Can you look at it unconcernedly, and turn away back to your own small hopes, and puny goals, and starveling dreams?

"The value of a really great man," says Harnack, "is that he increases the value of all men." Christ has increased the stature of humanity immeasurably; but has He left you still a crawling earthworm, nothing more? Well, if you really choose so, you must go. But not yet! wait a moment! look once more!

Cynewulf, the old poet, has a wonderful picture of the Day of Judgment. The sun has fallen from the heavens, the moon is darkened, all the stars are out; the only light

streams from the Cross; and in that strange and ruddy glow how differently things look from what they used to do in mere deceptive sunshine. Before you make your choice of a life, be certain you have seen things in the light of the Cross. For see how some that seemed so huge have shrunk to nothingness, and some you had thought insignificant have grown how vast! How this light changes everything! And it will be the only light upon the Day of Judgment! God, whom you had resented as an intrusion in your life, whom you had wished away, look at Him upon Calvary, and who can keep from loving one who has first so loved us? Our fellow-men, whom we had thought so small, so irritating, so upsetting, with their wretched plans that will clash against ours, how great and wonderful they are beside the Cross, for Jesus Christ has died for them, for each of them, counting them worth His all. Our own life, consider it in that revealing light, and is it not too big a thing to squander upon the poor little dreams to which you meant to give it? And look! why, surely it is not your life at all, but His who bought it at how vast a price. Seeing things as they really are, must you not also lift your hands, and looking up into that dying face, cry out, "I too am Thine; and, please God, I will live for Thee, and live like Thee, so help me, Christ, my Christ!"

IV

THE CLASH OF AGE AND YOUTH

"And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy. So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people."—EZRA iii. 11–13.

THE Bible will never grow out of date for many reasons, and for this other also—that every possible mood of the human spirit is photographed in it with such vivid life-likeness that we catch our breath, and stand still, staring in astonishment at what we ourselves have often felt and seen, but which we had assumed was something peculiar to ourselves, or at least individual to our day, a special characteristic that would always mark it out from other times, and yet here it is, all set down with a startling exactness in the experience of men and women dead thousands of years. So true is it that we are all much liker to each other than we know; that our boasted originalities are only yet one other echo of what has been blowing round the world, common as dust, almost since time began. There were doles in Greece, and war-time prohibition in China, and leagues of nations here and there, centuries before our Lord was born. Disheartening though it may seem, our problems are perennial problems. And what our own hearts in their secret places are to-day, that, very largely, human hearts have always been. Here, for example, in this dim corner of the Scrip-

tures, ill lit and but little frequented, suddenly we come upon how telling a picture of that unbridgeable chasm that yawns between one generation and the last, of that noisy clashing between age and youth, the din of which so fills our ears in our own day—age with its memories, its wistfulnesses, its regrets; youth with its valiant dissatisfactions, its hot enthusiasms, its confident hopes—the one standing with a shading hand up to its brow, gazing back lingeringly over dear familiar scenes from which it parts reluctantly; the other all impatience to be up and gone, looking out eagerly towards the new day, and "with morning in its eyes." So it was then; so it is still; so perhaps it must always be on to the end. Here, then, is a very real and practical and always pressing problem which needs chivalrous hearts and delicate fingers to handle it, if an unwisely hectoring and censorious experience, fretted by youth's crude and too confident immaturities, is not to nag and scold and sour; if an impatient youth, claiming its independence, is not angrily to fling away into an impudent intolerance; if the happy relationships God planned for both are not to be dimmed and clouded over by bickering, misunderstanding and sheer pettiness, and an unhappy lack of sympathy and seemly self-restraint. "I would," grumbles the testy old shepherd in *The Winter's Tale*, "that there was no age between ten and three-and-twenty, or that youth would sleep out the rest." Certainly that would make a quieter world; but obviously there is no hope in that idea, and we must light upon some other better way.

That was a great day in Jerusalem when they laid the foundations of a new temple. For, of all the horrors of the invasion and overthrow, nothing had burned itself so searingly into the people's hearts as the sight of God's house desecrated, fallen, a mere huddled heap of tumbled stones. All through the Exile that had haunted them. And now their hands were at last wiping off that insult spat into God's face. The site was cleared of its charred ruins; here at

length was a beginning actually made ; a very little longer, and the walls would be there, rising before their eyes. It was a dream so old, so dear, for long enough so hopelessly impossible. And it was coming true, was really coming true ! At thought of that their hearts spilt over, would not be contained, burst into praise and thanksgiving and a great shout of joy. But amid all that riot of happiness, the older people, who were very happy too, felt something salt and choking suddenly rise up in their throats. They were back for the moment among things that they could never see again : in the old temple of their youth, living again the great and unforgettable days, when they had met God face to face there in that stately house of His, back among all that they had known and loved—and lost. This new temple could never mean to them what that other had been. And indeed how very shabby it was, now they looked at it, and how mean and pitiful its whole design, judged by the standards that they knew. And what else could it be ? For what resources had they in their fallen state ? Cyrus had promised something ; but they could not expect too much from him. So they complained and criticized. And indeed the measurements were trivial, the whole scheme cramped and stunted. It was so brave a dream that they had dreamed : and was it all to end in this poor makeshift of a thing ? And with that, in their sudden emotional Oriental way, they burst into a passion of weeping. Till what is that the wind is carrying to us ? Is it rejoicing or a sob ? Is it a shout of triumph or a wail of hurt things crying out in pain ? It is the clash of youth and age, and in one way or another it is heard in every generation.

Still folk are young, still folk are old, and still we all stand at a new beginning. For the world keeps hurrying on. And always some are gazing out ahead with faith and hope and an immense enthusiasm. And always some keep looking back at what they think was better : at the big times, gone now, and, as they feel, leaving only a dull

appendix in small print, a sorry anticlimax of a chapter, a mere huddle of stupid nothings, like those last lean pages when a man's work is over, and he dodders to and fro till the end comes. For surely, they think, God Himself has half retired these meaningless days ; and surely men have very noticeably shrunk in stature, have become a pettier breed, have ceased to throw up mighty figures as they always used to do ; and surely nothing ever happens nowadays to fire men's blood in the old, wildly glorious way.

Perhaps that cleavage into two was never more apparent than to-day, and probably not often has there been more obvious reasons for it. Do you remember how, on the Somme, after the little towns and villages had been blown into nothingness till not one stone remained, they set up notice-boards that ran : " This was Bazentin le petit " ; " This was Bazentin le grand," and the like, and the whole district had to be rebuilt from the beginning ? For ten years now we have been toilsomely building up again a world blown into atoms ; are tired, and hot, and perhaps just a little cross with one another for getting in each other's way. And what do we think of it, this brand-new world that we have fashioned ?

Loyally the older people try to keep in step, and to adjust themselves to the new circumstances and environment. They want to like it, yet they are not sure that they do like it, catch themselves looking back across their shoulders wistfully enough to the old times, as to the place where their heart really dwells. And that is natural enough. They are home-sick. For did not Emerson tell us truly that, had any one been born ten years later or earlier than he was, he would have been an altogether different person, because set down in a quite other world, amid quite other thoughts and hopes and ways ? And their world with its ways, their ways, is vanishing, and, like an emigrant watching his native land fade out for ever, with his eyes full of tears and his heart grown unutterably lonely, so they, too, feel lost. And " when

he had served his day and generation," so we read, " he fell asleep." That is the most that nearly any one can do. And a generation quickly passes, and a day's sun soon sets. There is the time of preparation, and then some five-and-twenty years of work or more, and thereafter most of us begin to lag behind, to get in the way increasingly. More and more we impede the others ; more and more they push us aside, a little roughly and impatiently at last. Oh, get out of the road ! they cry. And with a start we recognize, if we are wise, that we have grown old-fashioned, and slow, and out of date, and perhaps even a little stupid. And if, as is more likely, we are not too wise, we flare up angrily into a chronic snarl of irritation at being jostled and bustled and elbowed so unceremoniously out of our sober pace. Stevenson tells us how acutely every Scotsman feels, the moment he has crossed the Border, that he is not in his own land. The Church is different, the laws are different, the ways and customs are quite curiously different, the houses are different, the people in their whole make-up are different. It may be only a few miles that he has travelled, and yet he is in another world. And we soon leave our day behind, and find ourselves outlanders in another, and not seldom home-sick in our minds.

And some ask petulantly why this has to be ? Why can't we settle down where we were, well content ? Why all this breathless rushing—after what ? A distinguished Anglican divine, preaching before the British Association, is reported to have urged that we might well call a halt in this mad running, might well mop our brows, and ease this agonizing stitch in our sides, might pass an ordinance to cease from further inquiry into material laws and forces till we have got our breath again, and have managed to adjust ourselves to all that we already know. That was a rather futile little bleat ; is obviously hopeless. For the world persists in spinning round and round, and won't stop because you feel giddy. It was a sheer impertinence for Joshua to bid the

sun stand still, till he had redd up his bits of affairs. And it won't listen to us if we try that desperate policy ; goes hurrying on, and quickly rises upon a new day.

And why not ? people used to ask. For we had a delightful idea that an automatic and mechanically perfect evolution had contrived that we were on a kind of moving stairway that kept rising up and up and still up, always leaving what was poorer, always reaching something better and still better. It was a very comfortable axiom that kept our minds quite easy ; but it has been a little roughly handled by the facts of life, and looks a good deal tashed and worn and frayed these days. Is it common sense to argue that, because a thing comes later, it must of necessity be worthier ? Can one really hold that everything that happens in this odd mix-up of a world is God's Spirit breaking in ? Isn't it nearer truth to think that a dark star rolls round at intervals between us and the bright one, and obscures its light for us ? Was it a nobler England in which people found themselves when Charles II. and his ugly orgies of unblushing lust swept away Puritanism, with its cleanness and its self-control ? "Heartily know, when half-gods go, the Gods arrive," trolls Emerson, with characteristic confidence. But is that always true ? Never a doubt of it, they held poor and crude conceptions of Jehovah in those early days in Israel. But was it better when all that was blotted out, and Baal and Moloch and their horrors took its place ? Life is too difficult by far to be summed up with adequacy in the smug headline of a copy-book. And are things really better nowadays than they were wont to be in the old world we knew ? Some question it, and they are not without their evidence ; look back regretfully—to the old views of the Bible, let us say. Well, they have vanished : for we must follow truth wherever it may lead. Yet they did seem to give to some a certain assurance, a certain feeling of security, of something solid underneath one's feet, where now to many there looks only emptiness. And the

old habits? They have passed. And for their part they miss them, and feel farther off from God without them. And the old modes of stating truth, which often had a reverence about them that seems lost? Francis Thompson admits that he found the shoulder of Christ too high for him to lean against. But the new generation does not appear to feel that. Rather, it links arms with Christ in the friendliest way; it talks and thinks of the great Comrade; but the old seemly awe that often filled the minds of those who lived with Christ seems gone. And a fine Indian writer, amazedly gazing at us so jaunty and unabashed, maintains passionately that that is what is wrong with modern western Christianity, declares with a white heat that the works even of Dr. Glover, of all men—books which have proved a crowded road for many of us back to God, and upon which we have met Him face to face—are to him simply irreligious. Here is a man, he cries, a typical representative of the religion of his day; and, face to face with Jesus Christ, he talks about His charm, and such-like little vivid surface trifles. Quite evidently he is interested, attracted, fascinated, if you will; but he is not upon his knees, is not down on his face before Him. And that is where we ought to be in Jesus' presence! Dr. Glover apart—for to him I too owe hugely—that charge is true of most of us. We are not down upon our knees; we are not lying on our faces; we are not in the mood that wades into the real deeps of Christianity.

I know that every age must link itself to Christ by what it can: I know that in sub-apostolic times they look to us now as if largely they had missed the whole point and splendour of the faith. They could, they did, work for it, live for it, die for it; yet they did not seem to understand it very deeply. And so it may be now. And yet a minister, writing to tell me of an epoch-making crisis in his life, which has lifted him into a new realm of Christian experience in which the biggest of the promises are his daily facts, and what we take as startling metaphors prove to him literally true, reports that, haunted

by a passage in a book that had revealed to him that there is infinitely more for him in Christ than he had taken from Him, he brooded over it for long, yet made no progress, until, going to his knees, he cried: "O Christ of Galilee! O Christ of Gethsemane! O Christ of Calvary, I give all of myself to Thee; give Thou all of Thyself to me"—a fearsome, glorious, heroic prayer; and it was answered with a staggering fullness. Ah! but we are not praying it.

We are prepared and eager to walk with Christ through the sunny days in Galilee, but are we facing with Him the dark mysteries of life?—aye, more, are we remembering that He Himself has said, with a solemn conviction, that unless we are taking our cross upon our shoulder, and are following Him some way into the darkness upon Calvary, into His passion of self-sacrifice, into living our life in His way and for His ends, we are not His disciples, and we cannot be?

Are things really so much better than they were in the old days? Many among us are by no means sure. Well, anyhow, they are gone, and they won't come again; not in that form, ever again. When you sail away to other lands you don't expect to find the peoples in those countries closely approximating to our ways at home. They have their own customs. No more can you with reason hope that a new age will look at things as did the one before it. All missionaries tell us that eastern Christians can never reproduce our western Christianity; that they too must think out the Lord for themselves—"their Lord," as Paul says in his catholic-hearted way, "no less than ours"; must come to Him on their own feet, must look at Him through their own eyes. And each new generation must be given that same liberty. There is indeed no need of giving. It itself claims and takes that as a primary right.

> "The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
> And God fulfils Himself in many ways,
> Lest one good custom should corrupt the world
> Comfort thyself."

The lines are threadbare with much handling and yet—even yet—their lesson is not learned.

It is still difficult for older folk to credit that; to act on the assumption it is true; to find, as Tennyson says boldly, comfort in it. Yet we must—must keep the windows of our mind wide open, must see that our soul is hospitable to new truth—no churlish host, but giving the new guests a hearty welcome; must resolutely refuse to shut ourselves into the past. Mr. Birrell, that fine discriminating bookman, at long last grew tired and discouraged. The new books did not meet his taste, seemed trivial and unappetizing. And he slammed the door and locked himself into the company of the great writers of the past, acting out Lamb's doctrine that when he heard a new book praised he read an old one. But after years of that he changed his mind, opened his door to the new claimants knocking at it, and found that he added another province to his wide-flung empire, that he has all the old delightful comrades undiminished in their glory, and these new minds too. So it should be with us. The Holy Spirit did not reach the end of what He had to tell us twenty years ago.

Robertson Nicoll, who loathed fresh air, "often declared," says his biographer, "that if he could have his way he would close all windows for ever; indeed, he would construct windows in the manner of the intelligent ancients, so that by no possibility could they be opened. He would aver that he meant to ask the railway companies to seal up the windows of some of their compartments, and label such 'Foul Air.' If they did so, he said, they would be astonished at the rush for carriages thus labelled." Well, there are minds like that, that hate fresh air, that love a stuffy, overbreathed atmosphere, that are terrified of draughts even when it is the winds of God that are blowing through the earth. But they cannot be healthy.

Man is as old as his arteries, it is said. He is not. He is as old as his soul. And some souls age so prematurely.

By middle life they are grey-haired and dull and drowsy, and at the extreme limit of all that they will ever be. But others remain young in sheer defiance of the years. Always they are eager, expectant, on tiptoe. Every glare of red in the sky is a fire, and they are off to find it—and they do. And this is not only an itch for novelty. It is because quite simply they assume that God is alive, and that wonderful news from Him is likely to break through at any moment. And we who are growing older must take pains to learn that art of keeping the mind young, of learning from our juniors. I don't think these weeping folk helped very much. The mood was natural enough, perhaps, but certainly not overmanly and little likely to do anything except dishearten those around them. And a mind that is perpetually looking back, and talking scornfully of all things present as a sad decadence, that is gloomy and pessimistic, that knows the reins have broken in God's hands, and that all things are hurtling hideously down to ruin, that keeps clutching the seat nervously, ready to jump when the disaster it is always foreseeing comes—well, it's a rather miserable rôle to fill, and surely not a little blasphemous. "You that are old," said Falstaff, when himself grey-haired, already too full blown and with petals ready to fall—"you that are old consider not the capacities of us that are young." And there was much more than knavery in Falstaff. That surely is the fitting spirit! "Look not mournfully into the past, for it comes not back again; improve the present while it is thine; go forth to meet the shadowy future without fear and with a brave heart."

But what about you who are young? Ah, well, you can be trying and exasperating too. That airy assumption of yours that all who went before you were incompetent bunglers, that you are the people and wisdom will die with you, or at least that suddenly the slow, dour thing has blossomed into full flower in your day, is less than just by far to that innumerable company of valiant souls who, with hard breathing,

toil and pain and sheer dare-devil heroism, won for you with their bare hands nearly all you have inherited. Look again at your possessions, at the simplest of them; and, like David, with that water from the well at Bethlehem which valiant men had risked their lives to bring, you too will feel, in an awed and even ashamed way, that these are vastly too valuable, have cost far too much, to make it seemly you should use them as if they were common nothings; will make you want rather to pour them out before God, who alone is worthy to receive them—these things how wonderful when you look at them closer, for has it not taken human blood and brains and lives to win each one of them? Don't forget that.

And yet what does the world not owe to youth—to its unnerving audacities, its hot revolts, its open breaks with the engrained and customary, its discontented flouting of the world as it is, its dogmatic certainty that it ought to be—aye and can be—far, far better? Why, that's what keeps the earth alive, the salt that saves it from corrupting into rottenness. When the Master looked about Him for a symbol of the type of heart that He finds hopeful, and with which He feels at home, He took a little child. And youth too stands not far from Him—youth with its big beliefs, its steady and straight-looking eyes, its sunny faith that has no doubts. It's that that keeps this old world of ours young. Don't be disheartened by old fogies chattering doleful criticisms. You be up and at what God has given you to see and do. And may He in His mercy bless you all your valiant days.

The temple you are raising does seem small, yet, after all, it is a temple where there were only ruins. Frankly, there are times when to us older people you younger folk look just irreligious; and then again we know you are not irreligious, that it is simply that your religion is of another type from ours, which is a very different matter and much less momentous. Judged from our angle it does sometimes seem that you are obsessed by the oddest passion of herding into conferences, of telling each other in minute

detail just what ought to be done, and that, that over, you seem to conclude your part is finished and so settle down, and nothing follows! Nor do you seem to mind. With all your conferences not often, never indeed for many years, has it been anything like so difficult to find ministers and missionaries, men willing to give their lives. There is by far more talk; there is by far less sacrifice. "Yes, yes," said Chalmers almost irritably, when they praised him for a marvellous oratorical triumph; "but nothing followed, nothing came of it." And without that, to him the thing was useless and an utter failure. But conferences seem to loom before your minds as an end in themselves. "He who would do good to another," said Blake, "must do it in minute particulars. General good is the plea of the scoundrel, the hypocrite, and the flatterer." Like every other, your generation must do good in minute particulars, by individuals, not waiting for the others, but one by one rising and putting themselves into Christ's hands.

Yet, on the other side, you have acuter consciences by far concerning certain social sores, simply can't understand how we could tolerate them, look at us in a way that we find most uncomfortable, much as we ourselves were wont to glance scornfully at the pious people who, prior to our day, served God with what they believed to be a convinced and honest earnestness, while yet thrusting little shivering frightened souls of six and eight down for long, dreadful hours into the darkness of the mines; and just as others down the centuries will look back at you too. For as yet it is a very crude and elementary Christianity we have worked out, which our successors, please God, will leave far behind. Meantime, when you look at us so hotly, we can only say that, though we cannot well explain it now that our eyes have been directed to them, the fact is we did not see these wrongs that so infuriate you—somehow, we never noticed them. "You see," we stammer, "they were always there; and our eyes ran across them." "Well, we do see

them," you say grimly, "and we can't stand them—and we won't."

And that is well. Only you seem to be touched by what Raleigh calls the "idiotic simplicity of the revolutionary idea"; seem to imagine that something external, economic, political, can change this tangled world for us into all that it ought to be, while you and I remain just what we were. It won't, says Christ. It is new men that are needed—another you, another I, another all of us—grown into new and Christlike creatures, with His new ways and thoughts and dreams. And you can be quite certain Christ is right. Still you do see that what, because it looked uncomfortably difficult to live, we pushed aside as obvious metaphors, not to be taken literally, are not metaphors but laws that we have got to learn to work out somehow. You are keen to do something: your hands itch to begin to build; to change these ruins into a Temple of God. You have indeed set happily to work, and everywhere there is the tinkling of the trowels on the stones, the sound of busy saw and hammer. Well, God bless you and give you good speed!

And what I would say to each of you is that you must be true to the light of your own generation. There is an old prophet who asks indignantly how people can bear to live in their own ceiled houses, while God's house lies in a blackened heap! And in this day of awakened social conscience, of endeavour to be helpful to each other, are you, for your part, going to hold aloof, to take no part in the characteristic enterprise of your own age, to spend your life dully and commonplacely upon your own ends, just as if these new visions had not risen on men's minds, to be so out of date as to think living for oneself is life? Listen to your own contemporaries; look round you for yourself! Is it not plain that God's will is not being done, that God's earth lies in ruins, that God's great plans are largely still to carry through? And are you to have no share in it all?

There was once a day of crisis in Jerusalem. For Uzziah, the father of his people, the great statesman on whose wisdom they had leaned, was dead. It was

> "As when a kingly cedar green with boughs
> Goes down with great shout upon the hills,
> And leaves a lonesome place against the sky."

And every one felt lost. That day a youngish man, bewildered like the rest, went to the Temple to beg God to raise up some one on whom they could lean. And why not you? said God, in sudden and most unexpected answer. And the man gazed astounded, hardly crediting his own heart; yet, finding it was said in earnest, rose up to his feet, dazed and stunned but obedient, "Here am I, send me." And to-day God is saying, Why not you? And you? And you? Christ needs you, Christ appeals to you, Christ follows you, entreating for your help. God made you for the work of your own generation. Don't throw away your chance! Arise and build, and help to make a better world!

And yet you must not mind me saying that the Temple that your generation is raising does look somehow small and mean and even poky. No doubt Carlyle declared that "it is better to build a dog hutch than to dream of building a palace." Not surely, if what you are building is for God. And your designs seem less than adequate by far. It does look as if there were something lop-sided, something missing, something wrong. What is it that you have left out? The Court of the Gentiles? Ah! you have made that a spacious place; and it was never busier, with all this bustle of social amelioration and reform, this buzzing and this clamour. The Court of the Women? You are taking down the barrier, I see, that used to keep them shut up by themselves, are giving them full access to God's service in the world. The Court of the Men? Yes, here it is. Yet there is something missing. Why, where is the Veil? And where the Holiest of All? And where a place in your religion for hush and

quiet and God's presence—for devotion and stillness and prayer? Have you made no provisions for these in your plans? Is your design that of a fussy little chapel, a rather grimy brick affair plastered with notices of endless breathless agencies, a homely, busy little place, with swing-doors always swinging, with the click of billiard-balls in its back settlements, and a smell of stale tea meeting everywhere? Or is it a cathedral, with its stillness and its space, its quiet and its sense of the infinities? There is something lacking at this end! Where is the Holy Place?

When a squire was to be knighted, he spent the whole preceding night in some cathedral face to face, alone, with God. And it was from that holy presence he rode out to his adventures and his high endeavours. Now our ideal, our hope, our source of power, is not that, but organization. We rely on voices, hoarse from much speaking, and on pushfulness, and on untiring energy; are always, on principle, so hot, so rushed, so perspiring, so set upon efficiency as we misunderstand that term, that we are letting the real central things die out. Your Temple does look small! Something is missing at this inner end of it, something that used to be here. Where is the Veil? Where is the Holy Place? None! None! Believe me, you will make little of a religion, however eager and humanitarian it be, that leaves out God.

V

THE ROMANCE OF RELIGION

"Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens."—Heb. xi. 33, 34.

THESE are thrilling words that stir the heart and make the blood run faster, that tell of tremendous and exciting happenings that must have called out all that there was in a man. Only, what has it to do with that tame and householder kind of thing, religion as we know it? Here are tales of adventure that storm the mind: brave pictures splashed with vivid colour—the hot red of danger, of blood, of fire cruelly licking about men's limbs while they stand steadfast through the intolerable pain. But all that comes to us, blown as the faintest echoes from how very far away, like memories of the wild raids that used to flame with a jingling of steel through the now peaceful border glens, or like fearsome imaginings of those heart-shaking cataclysms and upheavals before staring, jagged rocks were shaped and mellowed into these rounded knolls drowsing and golden in the autumn sunshine. It all lies in another universe from this prosaic world where, soberly and safely, we dodder upon our flat-footed way amid the little nothings that make up our unexciting days. Once, it would seem, religion had an appeal indeed, insistent, urgent, hard to be resisted by the man within us. For then it was a heroism that boldly, delightedly, daftly took its life into its hand and tossed it away unreckoningly and with a laugh; a chivalry that,

daring greatly, flung itself into grim wrestlings with principalities and powers and won ; or else fell unafraid, scorning surrender, yes, or compromise, mocking at death, looking down pityingly from an enormous height at the poor creatures triumphantly guffawing up into the clenched teeth of its silent agony. "The calm and disdain of the martyrs," as Whitman said. But nowadays this noble thing, that used to ride out gallantly, with pennons all a-flutter, seeking for high adventures, has grown old and shrunken and decrepit, an insignificant shadow of itself that dozes by the fire, its hardihood all cooled, its soaring spirit tamed, mumbling eternal anecdotage of its long-lost youth, when it was really something in the world and did things,—the splendour, the self-sacrifice, the valour of it vanished. As Meredith says, musing upon his own spirit grown old and stiff and slow,

> "Days when the ball of our vision
> Had eagles that flew unabashed to sun,
> When the grasp on the bow was decision,
> And the arrow and hand and eye were one."

All that has passed, and now "the arrowy eagle of the height" has tamed into "the little bird that hops to feed, glad of a crumb."

And, indeed, the immense machinery of the faith is set by us to very trifling ends, and wasted upon petty and prosaic uses. Once on a day, through this thing we too hold, venturesome spirits rushed kingdoms, wrought impossibilities, pulled down impregnable strongholds with their bare hands, changed the whole face of earth. But now we use it punily and unadventurously, and upon a very minor scale. To keep our temper when we are irritated, that is an achievement ; to choose unselfishly at some little decision, that is a victory to blazon on our banners. And that is all we make of Christ and the tremendous sacrifice of Calvary, of this exceeding great power that has come into the world, which we claim can do anything! The waters that once

leapt into roar and foam, flashing in the sunshine, have slowed into the dead sluggishness of a canal.

Largely, it is through that unheroic pettiness of ours that we are losing youth, whose eyes run across religion, as we live it, and pass on, searching for something more daring and interesting and exciting, something bigger to do with one's life than that. For, as we express it, religion has lost its romance, has dwindled to a very tame affair, looks unappetizingly slow. Set a boy to read *Cranford*, and he will soon fidget and yawn, for he wants something with more thrill in it, more blood, more movement. And religion, as youth sees it in our lives, strikes it as prim and proper, a blanched colourless thing that has no call in it upon its courage. If it turns in at all, it is apt to be aggrievedly, as to a parade service, and its one wish is, Hurry up, and get it through! You don't imagine any one is really enjoying this! And once out in the open air again, it fills its lungs delightedly, thankful that that is safely past. It isn't doubt that is keeping it away, but a sharp fear of ennui and utter boredom. It looks at Christ and what He has to offer, or at least at what we are making of it all, and thinks it dull, too dull by far to bear, and turns upon its heel, and lets it lie!

That is an amazing reading that must amaze no one more than Jesus Christ! For there were not many things that He said so often as that real religion to any one of spirit must be a fascination; and that, largely because it costs so much, and risks so recklessly, and has to dare so fearlessly. Again and again He pulled up eager claimants, asking them, Did they think they had the grit and stamina for the long strain of this breathless adventure. And, indeed, in His own day it was only daredevil souls, afraid of nothing, who could look a hostile crowd, gathering for an ugly rush, full in the eyes and never waver, who were willing to tug hard against the swirl of fiercely rushing currents, and fight, with their heads down and their breath

caught away, into the howling of great winds, who had it in them to push their way to Him through His unpopularity. "Blessed," said Christ Himself, "are those who are not offended in Me." And indeed there were not many who dared to declare for Him, and stand to it! And, for long enough, quite manifestly the first requisite of a Christian was a reckless intrepidity that was content to company with death day after day, a certain gallant cheerfulness under impossible conditions, like that of those winsome people in the catacombs who had a very gay religion, and needed it to bring them through the horrors and hair-breadth escapes that made up life for them. "We are not worried by these persecutions," writes Tertullian, "for we have joined this Church fully accepting the terms of its agreement with us, as men whose very souls are not our own."

And even long after all that was over, for centuries it was religion that mainly gave colour to life, that opened the door upon adventure, that shot things through with thrill and with romance. It was under the banner of the Cross that men flocked to the glamour of the East and to the clash of big events. The irreligious dozed on in their sleepy hollows, and in their dull way were content with their dull little jobs. Imagine two schoolfellows in Elizabethan times, grown up and turned each to his chosen life, the one tied down to a petty business in some narrow, unfrequented street, giving his days to adding one poor coin to another, and made happy by that very occasional chink; the other fighting with storms, boring through hurricanes, finding his daring way to new and golden lands across the seas. Just so did religion, for long enough, enlarge men's world, and bring into what otherwise had been a drab affair, an endless interest, a huge excitement.

Perhaps, you say. I do not know. But this at least is certain, it is not so now! They tell us that there still exists a little creature which is a lineal descendant of the mighty

dragons that once ruled the earth, awesome for size and strength and terror; but it is shrunk, poor futile beast, into a petty, harmless, innocent thing one pushes aside lightly with one's foot. Even so the colour, the adventure, the daring, the bigness, have faded from religion; and there is nothing now to fire the imagination, to thrill the heart, to sting one to great deeds, in this petty, sober-sided thing of prayer-meetings, and church services, and trivialities, and talk.

But that is what I just deny, holding that there is no life that can make so big a call upon stout-heartedness and courage as that to which Christ leads. Don't forget that even yet there are high places in the field where the old chivalries are being carried through as the mere daily routine of men's common lives. The Book of the Acts has not come to an end. Some nineteen hundred chapters and more are finished, and another is almost done, and these latter passages have bits in them just as wonderful as any there have ever been. Let us remember that in our own lifetime, in these so-called tame and degenerate days, there have been persecutions as ruthless and met as unflinchingly as any in the Church's gallant history; and martyrdoms as glorious, and triumphs every whit as marvellous; whole kingdoms won, and evils, woven into the stuff of things, it seemed, clean blotted out, and brave but quite impossible campaigns led to incredible and splendid victories. History, which at times foams and roars upon its noisy way, can at others glide past so quietly that no one recognizes what is happening; and it may well be other ages will look back at us as at a wonderful time, yes, even for its spiritual annals, as at a kind of arsenal in which they will find weapons with which to arm for their own fights—bewildering proofs of what God can do and has done.

But, that apart, in every mean street of every common town blossoms a heroism just as moving as that of any of the days of chivalry. For what is valour? Is it not to

face pain and disaster with one's head up and steady eyes, and a big heart that won't cry out or whimper? And there are many round us doing that day after day, and thinking nothing about it, entirely unconscious of the splendour of their gallantry; to whom it never occurs to do anything else. And what more did the greatest of the saints do in their day? It is their brave philosophy of life that brings them through; it is their religion that gives them their courage; it is because they have seen Jesus Christ that they have learned that the real heresies that damn a soul are not stumbles among the intellectual subtleties of theology, but to be fretful and pusillanimous under the blows of fate and the sore discipline of things. And of that at least, please God, they won't be guilty.

People's faces kindle at thought of Stevenson's big heart—and little wonder! You remember how at Hyères, while pinned to his bed by sciatica, and all but killed by a desperate hæmorrhage, he was afflicted by a horrible ophthalmia, and lay there for days with bandaged eyes, threatened with permanent loss of sight; and how, when his wife said bitterly, "I suppose you will say, as usual, that things have fallen out all for the best, if only we look at them in the right way?" "Why, now," he answered, "it's odd you should say that, for that's exactly what I have been thinking. What I needed was a rest, and this has forced me into it." Or that other day, when cramp in both arms would not let him write, and, taking to dictating, his voice flickered and went out, and, falling back on the deaf and dumb alphabet, his hands too mutinied through weakness; and (as he said laughingly afterwards) "if, as I maintain, my real forte is to speak with the expressive language of the eye, certainly my wife's is not to understand it." And it was in such desperate case that, refusing, as he said, to let the medicine bottles on his mantelpiece be the limit of his horizon, or the blood on his handkerchief the chief fact in his life, he kept writing articles so gallant, so

full, not of valour only, but of golden sunshine and the joy of life, so certain that any one—yes, even in the most desperate circumstances—can come through with his heart unbeaten and with a lilt in his soul, that Mr. Archer printed an irritated criticism of the too simple philosophy of this athletic young person who quite evidently, so he said, had lived his easy days in a sheltered corner and knew nothing as yet of the grim horrors others have to bear. "Let this exasperatingly happy person have one touch of rheumatic fever," he concluded confidently, "and he will quickly change his tune!" "Between you and me," wrote Stevenson in a private reply, "there lies this impassable barrier, that you simply don't believe me, think that I am posing and pretending—and yet I am not." That's what religion does for a man. It gives him such bravery face to face with the dread things of life that others can't take in that he means what he says—and yet he does; can't see how any one so tried and exercised can be so unperturbed and strong of soul—it isn't natural, they urge—and yet he is. But one can't bear the unbearable, they keep protesting. And yet he bears it day by day; and, where they snivel and whimper and bleat, makes no fuss nor complaint; and, burdened as he is, has still a hand to stretch in helpfulness to others round about him. For sheer splendour there is nothing to be compared to a Christian man when the dark falls, and the test comes, and some black rushing water must be crossed. For this thing works.

But, indeed, if any one is religious at all even in the sunnier places, of necessity his life is a tremendously exciting one, full of a constant thrill. What do you do with your day? asks Paul in effect. Tear out a sample page from your diary, and let us see what comes of it. Oh, well (you say slowly, for there isn't much to tell), I rise and breakfast, and glance at the paper, and make my way down to the office, and fill in the time with the usual things, and so get home again after a fairly successful day, or else one not so good.

And for the evening? Well, one fills it in with a game, or friends, or the theatre, or a book. Oh! nothing much—nothing to chronicle at least; the time just slips away till one turns in.

I see, says the apostle, looking at you like a Londoner at a lumpish and bucolic creature in some sleepy hollow where nothing ever happens, and the people seem half dead, torpid as flies in winter, and one just exists. But don't you find that very dull? That dullness of the irreligious life is what constantly struck the Master too. He couldn't see how people stand it. Now I, says Paul, while you have been pottering about these aimless nothings, have been wrestling with deadly powers set on destroying me. I have come through, but it was a great struggle worth having fought. I have been racing desperately for the prize of my own soul, and I have won, though I am left breathless and tired and panting hard. I have been in the ring, fighting my lower nature. And once or twice it got me down, and mauled me badly; but I, too, have been "battering it black and blue," and have scored heavily against it. Mine has been an exciting day. And it does sound far more adventurous than yours, although you choose to call his tame. Of course it is, says James; every morning we waken it is like going over the top. And the man's eyes are shining, and his face alight, and his heart, not stunned nor sick with fear, or at least beating fast, like a man running hard with quick, short steps, as yours was, you remember. Thank God, he says, to-day there is to be no lolling in the trenches; but something is to happen, something big and exciting, and that will tell; and I am to have my full part in it. "Count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations."

They tell us that in Georgia, as the result of generations of more or less constant warfare, their greeting in the morning is no tame "Good day" but "Victory"; and that one answers, "May the victory be yours!" That is the fighting

spirit with which Christians face their lives. Always they have to be alert and watchful, for round every corner there may lie adventure, and every common incident may land them of a sudden in grave perils. Always they are doing something, facing something, winning something, beating something, not drifting aimlessly through boring days.

That is a curious notion people have that Christians are Christians almost against their will, that they reluctantly submit to this obviously unappetizing affair only through fear of something even worse, if they held off. That is a sheer delusion. Mere stay-at-homes may not understand him, but a good soldier is a soldier, not for medals or decorations or even the thought of the cheering streets when the troops swing home at last with the war won. He likes the life. There may be, there is, horror and discomfort in it; and yet, give him his choice, and he would rather not be out of it, far rather. So it is not the thought of heaven, and of some ultimate reward that will all too tardily compensate for the slow time here and now, that draws souls to fall in behind Christ, and to follow to the firing line.

No one denies (why should we?) that the knowledge of that coming victory does hearten us, and that the glory of the far-off hope does give a bravery and sheen to life that make other views of it immeasurably mean and squalid. There are you, a mere insect of earth, shut in by your narrow horizons into your cramped little world. Well, you say, it is all there is. It isn't. After all, horizons are not real things, but merely the limits of one's vision. And we, it seems, see further than you do, and so live in an ampler universe. We know, indeed, what is the sober truth, that there are no horizons; and that one day we shall sail out through the horizons into an infinity of divine love—yes, and, please God, of serviceableness—whereas you are the gulled victim of an optical illusion and so are building up your life on an absurdity. After all, it is a great thing that, as Meredith

says, "to souls not lent in usury" there lasts "the rapture of the forward view."

But that apart, and, heaven or no heaven, we choose the Christ way for itself, are set on learning it, because it is by far bigger and braver than any other, is the only way of life worth while. And, by the help of God, we mean to try to play our part, to live cleanly and manfully and unafraid. What comes of us at last, what credit, if any, we get out of it—that is for God to settle; and in His wise hands we leave it with a quiet mind. Our part is to be faithful here. To be allowed to do the thing is in itself sufficient honour.

The fact is I, for one, am more than a little weary of this pose that pushes aside religion as a weakly thing, as too tame to be bearable by any one with red blood in his veins. Isn't that on the level of the complacent scorn of an illiterate for these mad souls who will insist on spending long evenings poring over endless lines of queer black dots upon white paper when it is open to the fools to sit hour after hour twiddling their thumbs, and gazing in the fire, and thinking about absolutely nothing, in a delightful vacancy of being? And it's not only silly, it is just dishonest. For the blunt fact is that the real reason why masses of people are not Christians is that they dare not; and multitudes of Christians are poor specimens simply because they are afraid to follow Jesus any closer. It would be so unusual! It would cost! It would mean such an upset of their ways! And so, when Christ challenges them, they cower back and slink away—haven't the heart and courage for it—and seek to carry it off and hide their cravenness by talking down at what they dare not be!

> "On the rock
> Stands prone my soul, a diver lean, undrest,
> And looks, and fears the shock,
> And turns, and hides its shame with some poor sorry jest."

And if you bridle up at that, and question such a reading of your life, then we can put it to an easy and immediate

test. Christ comes to you to-day and frankly asks you for your comradeship and help. As you know, He has set Himself to put down every evil, to right wrong, to save and uplift and glorify this ailing earth of ours. "Does that appeal to you?" He asks. "Would you care to spend your life for such an end? I can promise you the happiest of lives, He says, though your material comforts will be lessened, and many things upon which you are laying stress will have to go. I can't manage alone; I know that you could help Me, if you wished. Well, will you? Dare you?" And His face is eager, and His eyes are full of hope. "Good God, no!" you cry, starting back. "I mean to have a soft and cosy life!" But you wanted adventure, and where will you find a bigger? You told us scoffingly religion was so tame! And now it seems it is by far too hardy and unselfish a thing for you even to contemplate! Poor shrinking poltroon! you dare not pay the price of the big thing, but choose something more comfortable and less gallant. They daren't, said Christ. That is the ugly fact of it. You daren't! Few do.

Paul, for his part, was haunted by a dream that would not let him rest. "That I may know Christ," he kept musing, "oh! if only one day I may really know Him!" And it isn't merely intellectual understanding of the Master he desires, though in that region too he, greatest of the masters and explorers, feels like a scientist face to face with the tremendous facts of nature, conscious that anything he has discovered is a mere bodiless shadow of what he feels is there. You remember how they cut on Newton's tomb the proud and even boastful words:

> "Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night;
> God said, Let Newton be, and all was light!"

Yet he himself said that he was a little child playing with shells upon the beach of the unending sea of knowledge, not so much as embarked on it as yet. So Paul knows he is only fingering the edges of what there is for him and us in Christ.

But what he longs for, dreams of, cannot do without, is at long last really to grasp how to catch and reproduce Christ's spirit, how to learn Christ's way of living life, how to use himself as Christ did. He tells us what it is he wants to know; this and this he says, wading in deeper and deeper, till at last his daring spirit boldly lets slip to us the secret of its ultimate, audacious goal—how far away as yet he feels—"that I may know the fellowship of His sufferings"; not only get from Christ, but give to Christ, something that costs; may share in His unselfish gallantry for others; may be allowed to throw myself away, to give my life, to bear and suffer something that will further the saving of the world, no matter what the cost may be to me. Daringly he held up his life against the tremendous background of the Cross, and it breaks his heart that there is still that noisy clash between the two. I know, he says, that Christ is Christ, and I am only I. And yet these ought to match in tone and colour. I too should be living in that same spirit, and for these same ends, and with something of that same chivalry.

That, then, is the ambition of a religious man. And you thought it was dull and soft and prosy! There was a Moslem prophet. Some think he was a lunatic, but others rank him with the greatest of the saints. They crucified him, and as he hung there in agony, he lifted up his heart in thanksgiving to God. "Of His own cup He lets me drink; such is true hospitality," he cried exultantly, grateful that God was letting him share in His own pain for this poor, sin-sick world.

That was Paul's dream. And do you tell me you find that a dull thing, a tame use to make of life compared to your own petty purposes that seldom rise above a search for your own comforts or the increase of your money? Brazen it out with tall talk how you may, you know the fact is that you are too small, too soft, too cowardly to be religious. Mr. Abercrombie tells us of a shrinking soul who hung back desperately from the call of Christ. For he felt,

as you do, that "there is naught more precious in the world than I," that his own interests came first, that whatever happened he mustn't be tried and hurt and shaken, protested whimperingly that God knew

> "What a frail soul He gave me, and a heart
> Lame, and unlikely for the large events."

That's what is wrong with you. And it won't hide. When the great day had really come at last, and the knight and his knot of retainers, gathered there in the village street, moved off for the Crusade, no doubt there were those who had shirked and who stayed at home. They might creep back to their soft beds, and stretch themselves luxuriously; they might, through the long months, laugh at the poor fools sweltering yonder under the hot sun, wounded as like as not, in any case throwing their lives away upon a daft adventure, while they themselves, safe and in shelter, were making way and growing rich. But always they could read their shame in every woman's eyes, and in still moments hear it in the clamour of their consciences. "You," says Paul, "have been called of God into a partnership with Jesus Christ" in the greatest adventure man was ever offered. Slink away if you will! But at least face the facts! You are not Christ's because you are too soft and cowardly to follow Him.

VI

ON THE ART OF THINKING IN TERMS OF THE CROSS

"Any one who does not take up his cross and follow where I lead is not worthy of Me."—MATT. x. 38 (Weymouth).

IS it not fearsomely easy to come to take the Cross for granted; really to forget about it, and to be no different because that tremendous fact is there?

In every village in our land, that day its War Memorial was unveiled, a wild surge of emotion rose up chokingly in every heart. And for weeks after nobody could see it except through eyes grown suddenly dim. But now the women coming from the well set down their pails under its very shadow, and chatter eagerly about the little nothings of their little world, and scarcely so much as remember it is there. And so our heedless eyes can run unarrested over that Cross that all our days has been a bit of our mental landscape. It has been always there, and so we barely notice it.

Sometimes, indeed, we do grow hot-faced because this amazing thing does not haunt us, claim us, lay compulsion on us, as we feel it ought to do. And now and then—at a Communion, or at a Good Friday service, or, thank God, upon occasion for no very definite reason and at quite ordinary times, the mists lift and scatter. And, staringly, it looks at us, how real, how near, how awesome, till our hushed hearts hold their breath. But the fog soon closes down again, and it fades out; and we forget once more.

How are we to avoid this dull, unseeing callousness? How can the Cross become really effective in our lives?

Well, I suppose that in most homes in Jerusalem, after that Passover when Jesus died, things moved on just as usual; that the worshippers from elsewhere scattered, each of them back to the life that he had left, and continued the pattern of that with no very noticeable break. Even Pilate, according to Anatole France, by and by remembered nothing about that little incident that for the moment had worried him. For other matters, closer to him in point of time, and more important as he estimated things, or at least touching his own interests more nearly, jostled it from his mind.

But there was one at least who would not, and could not, forget—that worthy man who, coming into town on his own business by the Calvary road, chanced, just where it dips down into the city, upon a clustered knot of folk, and among them here and there the glint of helmets glittering in the sunshine; and, pushing in to see what it was all about, found that a prisoner had more or less collapsed under His cross; and, seeing that was all, was, no doubt, turning to go upon his way, when a hand fell on his shoulder. "Hie, you! Lend a hand here! Here's the man for the job!" And with that he was being hauled and hustled into the centre; and they were laying the cross upon his shoulder—how he shuddered at the touch of the grim thing! —were steadying it—"Grip it, man, can't you! There now!"—were roughly bidding him move on. It was in vain that he protested he was going the other way, and that he had urgent duties waiting for him; in vain that he cried out indignantly that it was a gross outrage that he, a respectable citizen, should be so villainously insulted and demeaned, paraded through the streets as if he were a condemned felon on the way to execution. "Do you expect us to carry the thing?" the soldiers growled. "Not likely, on a day as hot as this! On with you! or perhaps you'll

know more about a cross than the weight of it before you are many moments older!" And, with a burning face, and a heart seething with rage and shame, he had to do their bidding. No! he would not forget, would talk of it until the day he died, with the old fierceness flaming out uncooled.

Or if, as it appears, Simon became a Christian, ah! then still less could he forget. For every time he sinned a sin would not he cry out, "Miserable me! Is it not enough that I had an unwilling share in my Lord's crucifixion; that these very hands of mine held the cross to which I saw them nail Him down, and this my shoulder, accursed to the end of time, carried it for Him yonder to the place of horror? I! I did that! And now once more I must hurt Him, and take sides against Him, and break His heart afresh." Or, with a change of mood, when some sacrifice was asked of him, would not he break out into happy exultation? "In the mysterious providence of God, He gave to me a share in the salvation of the world, yes, even me, enabled me to make it all a little less hard for the Saviour. And now again He grants me a new opportunity of helping Christ, of close comradeship with Him in His sorrow." No, he would not forget! But all his days, for him at least, it would remain vivid and real.

And Thomas à Kempis tells us, getting very near the heart of things, that if you and I wish the Cross of Christ to come home and grow real to us, we also shall effect that best, not by arguing about its meaning, not even by long brooding on it in a hush of spirit, but by carrying it after Him—we too. And how? Each of us must of course particularize that for himself. There are sins, our individual sins, that each of us must crucify in Jesus' strength; and sacrifices, our personal sacrifices, that each of us must make for Jesus' sake. But, for complete success, we need something less spasmodic and occasional, broader and more general, than that. The spirit of the Cross must, as it were, be soaked into the very stuff and fibre of our mind. It

must become the standard by which we judge everything, the background before which our whole life is enacted, so that that solemn shadow falls across it all, and tells on every incident.

The War has radically changed us as a people in many ways, not least in this that it gave us a new standard of measurement. In the old days, the mass of us had a small wage and meagre incomes, thought in little sums; and what nowadays seem trifling figures sounded then huge and staggering and impossible. But the reckless flinging about for years of hundreds of millions, and much glib talk of really unimaginable monies, have altered the whole scale of people's thinking, made us by far larger in view and bigger in outlook, more wasteful and extravagant. In these times a mere million or two seems a negligible thing. And the Cross ought to have changed us, too. Before it was set up, our standards were far lower. Duty, uprightness, honour, these seemed tremendous calls upon us then. But the generous prodigality of Christ's self-sacrifice, once it is seen, alters the whole scale of one's thinking. Here, as elsewhere, what Wordsworth says is true, that a life given for truth becomes a law of nature for the rest of us. In view of that we daren't live on in the old way, for this new fact has made that out of date. Or so at least it ought to be. But, in hard fact, our problem is just this, that obstinately we still live in the old obsolete fashion, with the old cramped ideas of what becomes us, and the old niggardliness of view. We have not learned the habit of thinking in terms of the Cross, of applying that in all things as our standard, of carrying it after Christ through all the multitudinous details of our daily life, of putting those through, as each of them arises, in the spirit of that. And yet until we learn that art, we are not really Christians.

What would you say to making for Calvary from a new direction; following not the beaten way to it, but a roundabout, little-frequented, grass-grown path, hardly a bridle

track ? For, coming on it from that unfamiliar angle, it might strike us as it does not do now, viewed from where we have seen it all our lives.

Well, hidden away in a forgotten nook of the Old Testament is one of the most daring flights alike of Scripture sarcasm and Scripture faith. A brave man, Zechariah, was attempting what appeared to be a hopeless task, to rekindle an enthusiasm that had died away, been stamped out into blackness and cold ashes, so that not one spark of it remained ; to rouse again the very hopes which folk were feeling bitterly had fooled them of their lives ; and which, so they alleged, they had already proved to be impossible.

And indeed it was some twenty years since they had set out from their exile and captivity in Babylon, with what enthusiasm and high leaping flames of confidence and hope ; since, with bewildered thanksgiving to God, they who but yesterday when they lay down had been a broken people with no future, a mere crushed group of serfs lost in the crowds of mighty Babylon, had wakened up to find themselves free folk again, and with their faces once more turned towards home, ah ! with what lofty dreams and bold assurances ! For they were going to rebuild Jerusalem ; to restore the ruined Temple ; to rally Jewry once more round it into a great people, and set up again the fallen glories of the race in more than the old splendour. And it was all so real to them, so sure, so near ! Yet that was twenty years ago ; and not one of their dreams had grown into reality, not even one ! They had indeed, two little groups of them, struggled through the long deserts, fearful and harassed and often all but blotted out ; still they had reached their goal. But more than that they could not do. For although twenty years had come and gone since then, and the young heads that dreamed the big dreams were now growing grey, still Jerusalem lay in her ruins, more or less ; still the wild beasts prowled through the fallen Temple

courts; still they themselves were, not a mighty people with wide-spreading territory, but a little huddle of famine-stricken folk, encamped precariously there amid the debris and black ashes of their ruined greatness, and hard pressed by the insolent tribesmen round about. All hope and expectation had long died away; and they had sunk for years into a sullen resignation to their lot, had become half content with it, at least accustomed to it, so that it no longer stung them. Till God sent among them the manful voices of Haggai and Zechariah ringing out the old intolerable longings, stirring the old memories, urging them on to the old lofty hopes.

But this time it was doubly difficult. For when every hand was needed in the work, at least half of the people were mere idle critics and wet blankets, scoffing and jeering at whatever was attempted; or at least sadly shaking pessimistic heads, and confidently prophesying failure and disaster. Were the foundations of the Temple once more laid? Ah! this will never be like the old Temple of our day, they croaked. How poor and cramped and shabby this is going to be! Did they restart the long-neglected task of rebuilding the city? What is the use? these others muttered. At best anything that we can raise must be, not a great capital, like that of which fools who will not face ugly facts still dream, but a mere paltry provincial town, like any other country town. Till Zechariah both summed up and answered all this murmuring and faithlessness and discontent in one vivid picture of a fatuous youth blandly proposing to measure the immeasurable with a foot-rule! "And I saw a young man with a measuring line in his hand. Then said I, Whither goest thou? And he said unto me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what is the breadth thereof, and what is the length thereof. And the angel that talked with me said, Run, speak to this young man, saying, Jerusalem will be a mighty city that will overflow whatever walls are built for it, whatever boundaries are set it; will grow yet more

and more and more. And you propose to measure this with that futile yard-stick of yours!"

That is a piece of sarcasm that never becomes out of date, but which requires to be repeated year by year. For this poor creature, with his absurd measuring-stick, is never far away. What generous movement has not, at its rise, to run the gauntlet of his suspicion and belittlement and confident predictions that, talk how they like, it will end in little or nothing?

And it is no small part of our duty as Christian people to be done with that; to escape from this mania of valuing things by their sensible size, or by the world's crude standards; to lay aside yard-sticks and foot-rules and the like, to turn to the Cross of Christ, and in all our thinking measure things by that.

So to do lands one in a singular world, where the relative importances of what lies about us have been strangely altered. Some things that loomed up huge and imposing grow suddenly dwarfed, shrinking into paltry nothings. For example, you have grievances, sore grievances, and slights, real slights; and you can't forget and can't forgive them, so you say. You know that Plutarch warns us that anger is a mist that magnifies things oddly out of all proportion to their actual size. But it is not so in this case, so you cry doggedly. Here there is no exaggeration. You are aware that our Lord lays it down inexorably that, without exception, and time after time, however trying people prove, we on our side must seek to maintain the old friendly feelings towards them, that He makes that an absolute condition of our own forgiveness at God's hands, so that, as Johnson says, if we harbour a mood of ill-will towards any one at all, because of that, for us "the throne of mercy is inaccessible, and the Saviour of the world is born in vain." And yet, perhaps, even so knowing, your heart remains hard and implacable, won't change. But let the shadow of the Cross fall across our injury and sore; let us take in the wonder of

our own forgiveness by a God whom we have so grievously and repeatedly insulted, heaping up wrongs against Him day by day; let us see ourselves as that hot, angry creature of Christ's parable seizing his fellow by the throat, demanding instant payment of his trumpery bill of twenty pounds, he who has just had cancelled his own staggering debt of some three millions, has his discharge for that there in his pocket, given him not half an hour ago, and the thing grows impossible, and our anger dies away. For what had seemed so huge that it filled our whole mind looks upon Calvary how trifling!

And so with the world's prizes and the like. Elsewhere it seems natural and well worth our while to give ourselves for these. But beside the Cross so to do seems as unseemly as the rattling of the dice-box yonder, where men, cursing, laughing, quarrelling, are gaming for the poor perquisites before Christ's dying eyes. Face to face with Him, can you do only that with life?

So in a hundred things, if you would see them in their true proportions, measure them, not with that preposterous yard-stick of yours, but by Christ's Cross.

But there are many matters which so measured become, not dwarfed, but bigger by far than we had realized.

Take sin, your daily sins and trespasses, and mine. There was a time when that lay across life dark and terrible, appalling as an eclipse's threatening shadow, a fearsome and immeasurable horror. But in our day we have applied the foot-rule to it, and discovered it is no great matter after all. There is the length of it, and there the breadth of it, we say, the merest bagatelle that need disquiet no one. Maeterlinck pictures God as sitting on a sunny mountain smiling at our gravest offences as only the naughtiness of puppies playing on the hearthrug. And many a one who is a little startled at that is living life in such a way as proves that he believes it true. What do we care about our selfishness or outbursts of temper? Do we not rise from them

and go our way, and clean forget about such trifles altogether? Ah! but the yard-stick cannot measure everything. For some things we require the Cross of Christ. And with that in our mind how dreadful our sins grow, our little daily trespasses and falls! Not sitting on a sunny mountain do we see God now, but bowed in agony within the darkness round the Cross where His uttermost self-sacrifice was just enough to save us, and no more,—for God gave all God's all; and every bit of it was needed;—and not smiling at our worst offences as at mere playful naughtiness, but wounded to the quick by it, and so determined that this hideous horror must take end, that He accounts no loss, no sacrifice, no sorrow to Himself too vast if thereby it can be obliterated, and eagerly goes through them all for you and me.

Look at the Cross, if you would measure sin aright, your little daily trespasses and falls; look at its cost to God; look at the man Christ Jesus on the tree, and take it in that is the perfect picture of how God always is affected by it, every time so hurt, so wounded, so heartbroken! So will you grasp its hideousness and horror, and be filled with loathing for this awful thing. Our one chance, Newman thought, is that we be shocked by sin. Look upon Him whom we have pierced, and surely that must shock us, till we hate what caused Him that, fly from it, find a new power surging up within us that gives the strength to cast it forth, and make an end of it.

Or take the biggest thing in the whole universe, the deepest, the most inexhaustible, God's love. How busy we have been all down the ages with our wretched little foot-rules upon that, complacently measuring the immeasurable, marking it off—this is its length, and this its breadth—fixing the bounds and limits of this illimitable thing, setting up barriers which we declare it never passes, and marks which we say with assurance it can never overflow, declaring confidently this and that it cannot overlook, and

that and this it never does, judging of God, in short, by our own petulant, foolish, sullen, earthly human hearts!

For my part I am done with that. Isn't it amazing, this assurance with which we little creatures talk of the deep things, forgetful that even in this dust-speck of a world of ours so many wonders are constantly happening of which we know and can know nothing at all, because we have no senses with which to pick them up. We can see, for we have eyes; can hear, for we have ears. But to how much as real as beauty or as music, we must remain impervious. And is it not ridiculous that we, so limited in our equipment, should claim to be able to plumb the unfathomable thoughts and all-wise ways of God!

You have looked into a tiny pool and watched small insects wriggling at the bottom of that, their whole world. And you and I, are we not also petty creatures, hardly larger, crawling about the bottom of a little pool of air—some three miles deep or so—an infinitesimal pond in this huge universe? And yet we dare to take the love of God into our puny hands, and talk of that bewilderment as if we can see over it, and under it, and on all sides of it, and round and round about it, this thing so tremendous, so unreckonable, that Paul declares that it will take the whole of us, throwing in all our experiences into a common heap, even to glimpse an adequate hint of what, even then, will prove by far too overwhelming for our human minds really to grasp at all. Stand by the Cross, and surely you must see that what God means by loving is an amazement we can never understand, a thing that has no ends nor bounds nor limits anywhere. What it can do, or cannot do, I do not know. But after my experience of it, anything seems possible. All that is sure is that we, one and all, even the worst of us—yes, this whole blundering earth of ours—are hemmed in and surrounded by this unthinkably glorious thing, so strong, so patient, so enduring, so not to be shaken off, that however desperately we have failed Him, that

however often we have thwarted Him, that however far we may have wandered from Him, God still loves us ; and that there is no place in all His universe where that love of His is but a faded memory of what once was but is not any more ; that even though men make their beds in hell, God, who is love, and cannot cease from loving, loves them even there.

Have you allowed your sins, your doubts, your fearfulnesses to persuade you that He has grown cold to you, must have grown cold ? Well, it is natural enough, for you and I would not have stood one tithe of such deliberate and impudent wrong as we have done to God. And yet, lay down your little human foot-rule, and turn to the Cross, and measure this by that. Do you not see it was for those who were His enemies Christ died ? Do you not understand the parable of these arms spread so wide upon the Cross, that anybody, everybody, may be gathered in ? Do you not grasp, not even here, how dear you are to God, that He shrinks back from nothing that can help and save you ? Don't measure Divine love by our poor human thoughts, and ways, and hesitations, and supposings, but by the Cross of Christ. And you will find, however poor a thing you are, it stretches out to you : however vast your need be, it can meet it all.

Or take it of our fellow-men. They tell me that there are uninteresting people in the world. For my part, I have never been unfortunate enough to meet them. Still, have it as you say. Certainly Anatole France in his final look round upon life gave it as his verdict that there is at least one thing of which we can be absolutely sure, that men are always smaller than they seem. Not so thought Christ. Not smaller, always bigger ; that was His confident assumption. Yet in truth it is a little difficult at times not to lose patience with them. In the herd they seem so slow to rouse to high enthusiasm, can be so woefully ungenerous, are so apt to be easily fooled by any glib-tongued trickster, that

they tire out our sympathy. And we ourselves, the mass of us, are far from clever, are indeed a little dull and stupid, are we not ? At least we are very ordinary people, whose tame, uneventful lives consist of a round of petty nothings, whose interests are very limited, whose conversation hops futilely enough, like a canary in a narrow cage, back and to, and back again, between a little spar or two, even in this wonderful world crowded with thronging interests. Well, certainly it does not sound exciting ! And no doubt at all some personalities do seem colourless and drab. But lay aside your foot-rule ; think in terms of the Cross ; and, ah ! how that changes our estimate ! In the New Testament, when people are provoking and impossible, the Apostles never tried to explain the ugly facts away. Yes, they agreed at once : and still Christ loved them. That is their sole argument ; and is it not enough ?

Once in Annandale there was a plain old peasant woman, crouching over her cottage fire. And you would not have looked at her a second time. But had somebody whispered, " That is Carlyle's mother," with what a new respect you would have treated her. And she was worthy of it. Ask her famous son. And there is not one among all we meet but is a friend of Jesus Christ, or might be, would he take the honour. No, not one. And that does make us look at them with other eyes. " I couldn't love him, but his mother did," declared Pompilia of her blackguard husband. And the thought of that came to her as a corrective, softening her own rising bitterness against him. So when people seem narrow and bigoted or hopelessly unreasonable, I couldn't love them, but Christ does ; and knowing that, I, too, can do it ; see they are far bigger than I thought ; and gladly give myself for them whom Christ esteemed worthy of all His all.

Or take it of our use of life, our work for God, our possibilities of service. Tut, we cry, busy with our tape-measures, what would it all amount to, anything I have to

offer ? What possible difference could I make in this mighty world-wide conflict between good and evil ? I might perhaps teach a class of half a dozen unattractive urchins, or look in on an old soul now and then, or trudge round a collecting district, or the like. But such a petty thing could never tell upon the general struggle !

Yet to attempt to measure what God's grace can do through our poor efforts is the maddest folly. Is it so small a thing to bend and tinge and make even one of those little minds, though all the rest remain impervious to all your efforts all the years ? " I can't realize that I should ever be so honoured of God," writes Smetham ; " I can go on working, I can sow a little, I can add my labour to the heap, in hope that among other agencies I may help rather than retard. But to save a soul as the direct result of my personal effort ! " And yet that august possibility lies open to us all. And we can never tell. For momentous happenings have a way of slipping in through unwatched doors, where indeed there seems to be no opening at all. Has not Gore told us that he, brought up in a Protestant atmosphere, had his mind turned in the new direction it has followed ever since, by a forgotten tale—if I do not misunderstand him, a child's story—on which he chanced as a boy ? How much has flowed from that ! Didn't a certain Black Friar one day open his heart to a youth ? He is forgotten, and yet he made Scotland. For his words gripped, haunted, laid compulsion on John Knox ! And didn't a disappointed man in an Argyleshire glen, with nothing to encourage him, keep on teaching his dwindling class year in, year out ? And have not the ends of the earth good cause to honour him because one day one little lad, as he sat there and listened, made up his mind to be what he became, James Chalmers of New Guinea, whom Stevenson so envied ?

Ah ! put away your foot-rule. It is out of place and makes you look ridiculous. Go, tell that young man with his grotesque yard-stick yonder, quick, hide it out of sight,

for you are setting out to measure the immeasurable with a foot-rule !

In any case, and let the visible result be what it may, this at least is certain, that you can help and hearten Jesus Christ ; and that He takes these little services as personal kindnesses done toward Himself. Old Dr. Duncan used to say that, if he had been given his choice of any rôle in history, he would have chosen to be the angel sent to strengthen Our Lord in His Agony. Yet even that tremendous task is open to us all. Come to the Cross, and standing here beneath it, look up into Christ's face, and do you grudge Him anything that you can give and do ? There was a bluff but kindly soldier who held up a sponge with vinegar to the poor parched lips. " Let be," the others cried. But he would not desist : rough fellow though he was, he did what he could for Christ. And you, can you stand here unmoved, and hugging your life close, say snarlingly, " No, it is mine, and I must have the whole of it all for myself," and spare Him nothing ? Standing here beside the gift of His whole life for you, dare you, and can you, and do you ?

Surely the most thorough way to carry Christ's Cross after Him is to get it so into our minds that it becomes our rule, our norm, our standard in all things, a kind of water-mark that shows through all we think and are and do.

So will it grow at last effective in our lives : so shall we really prove our gratitude to Christ ; so will He see with gladness it was not in vain He died.

VII

HOW TO FACE LIFE WITH STEADY EYES

"God is a shelter and stronghold for us; we shall find Him very near; therefore we never fear."—Ps. xlvi. 1–2 (Moffatt).

THERE was consternation in Jerusalem. For days ugly rumours had been blowing in on every wind, at first loftily discredited, for, of course, God would work for His people against these heathen dogs, but growing more and more detailed and uncomfortably circumstantial every hour. And then the first panting refugees arrived, with hideous stories, exaggerated no doubt by their panic, of what was happening below the horizon yonder. And by and by the roads were blocked by fleeing folk. Once I rode up for two days through the like in France. Never a male there younger than seventy; mile after mile of hurrying women, and children pleasantly excited, poor innocents, and old, old tottering men, each of them, to the feeblest and the wee-est, loaded with bundles of cherished possessions, and all of them dry-eyed, big-hearted, still unbroken, although leaving everything they had and knew, and faring forth into a homeless, empty, hopeless world. And then, no doubt, that died away, though now and then a straggler, barely escaped with life, would clamour for admission, and some postern be grudgingly reopened for the briefest moment, and then hurriedly slammed to again. And inside, every one had gathered on the walls, stood staring in the one direction, where that long line of fires of burning homesteads and the like crept ever nearer as blaze after blaze shot up; the

women—you remember that touch?—with their fingers always twitching nervously about their lips although their eyes were tearless; the men speaking low, because already fear was knocking at their hearts. A few hours more, and these invincible armies would be coiled chokingly about the little town. And then, God pity us, what then? Everywhere there were consternation, and confusion, and despair.

And among it all this man moved calm, and cool, and unafraid. Why? Life had taught him to know God, and he trusted Him absolutely even then. "Aren't you forgetting God?" he asked the scared and shuddering groups. And yet when did He ever fail us? How often He has found a way when to our fathers there seemed no way, and they had sat down, hopeless and helpless, and feeling this, then, is the end. How often in our history a door has opened in a dead blank wall, where certainly there was no door. How they had searched and groped for it, and there was none. But always, even though flustered and confused they overlooked Him, God was very near. And is He not the same God still? And for us also He will manage somehow. Even yet He may save us. Who can tell? If He does, it will be like Him. And the man's heart obviously clings to it that in some way He will. That seems the whole point of the Psalm. And if He does not, then He will give us grace to see things through. For this is not the end; and this dear land of ours, scorched, blackened, charred, will yet know spring and green and loveliness again. To us, too, God is very near, and we shall find it so. For his part, he already felt Him there, and every now and then turned to look up into His face with a child's utter confidence. And so he watched the smoke-clouds rolling ominously nearer, with steady eyes and a heart strangely quiet, queerly unafraid.

That is one of the differences that religion makes. It keeps one cool and brave when others falter, enables one to

look out upon life with all its hazards and its threatening possibilities, even to live through the grimmest of these, when for us too they have become dreadfully real, with a bigness and a courage that make other folk look small and peevish, cowardly and mean. The power to do that, to remain so unperturbed in trying days when things go wrong, to face the difficulties and the disappointments that life brings with pulses beating quietly and a heart that can see this through with honour, to be cool and undismayed when others whimper and break down, is one of the gifts that Christ explicitly promises, one of the natural outcomes, so He assumes, of fellowship with Him. I haven't much to leave you, He said with a smile; but there is one thing I can give no one else can, something that will keep you always steady, that will lift you clean above anxiety and worry—better than that, that will make you a rallying-point at which others who had grown frightened and lost heart, suddenly sure of God again, and themselves bigger and better and braver because they have chanced on you, will turn and face, with stout hearts, what had beaten them, and win. "Peace I leave with you, My peace give I unto you," the very strength of My own soul, the very calm of My own spirit, the very secret that has kept Me steadfast among all My difficulties and temptations. I have done it because I have always known that I am not alone, but that the Father is with Me. And you too can count with confidence on this, that whatever befalls you, you will find Him very near, that He will never forget and never fail, but will always be there where you have need of Him. And being sure of this you can go on to face life valiantly.

Such serenity of mind is a great gift. For here are we set down in this dangerous world, so frail, so vulnerable, with these sensitive hearts of ours so easily wounded, and with dear ones always lying open to how many perils always there, and always leaping out on somebody; and our turn too must come of parting and of heartache and of pain,

perhaps of a long agony of suffering to be met with hands clenched tight and lips kept resolutely shut, lest a cry break from us, and "only this to hope for, more of pain, and doubt if we can bear it to the end"; and some day, some most certain day, the cold rush of the waters of death about our feet plucking them from us, and the fading out of all the kindly things with which we are familiar, and the setting forth into the unknown all alone.

Aye, and there is worse. The ancients had an appalling notion "that we are surrounded above and below," as Gilbert Murray has it, "by spirits, winged influences, shapeless or of unknown shape, sometimes the spirits of death, sometimes of disease, madness, calamity; thousands and thousands of them, as Sarpedon says, from whom man can never escape and hide." "All the air so crowded with them," says an unknown ancient poet, "that there is not one empty chink into which you could push the spike of a blade of corn"—Paul's "principalities and powers."

And certainly evil does often spring suddenly out of nowhere, and clutch at us; and horrible eyes do seem to follow us, watching with ghastly intentness for our unguarded moments. "Go," wrote Stevenson, from the ends of the earth, with his soul still shuddering at thought of it, "the first grey, east-windy day into the Caledonian Station, if it looks at all as it did of yore. I met Satan there."

Often I have looked round that prosaic place, with people bustling for their trains, remembering it was there that his supreme soul-conflict once leapt out upon a fellow-man who, no doubt, had turned in as unconcernedly as I have done to-day. And most of us have had our similar experiences. It takes some gallantry to face life's certainties.

How irreligious people manage I don't know; and yet I do. It is because they are far more religious than they think. This generation, largely non-churchgoing, and with Bibles left unread, is still living upon the rumours of the

faith blown to it from its fathers' time ; and when the crashing billows of life buffet and toss them helplessly to and fro, then, unconsciously, their hands clutch of themselves at the spars and broken pieces of the faith of other days still floating on the waters of their minds, and only because desperately they keep hold of them is it that they are borne to land, saved by the faith that they ignore.

> " Some may, perchance, with strange surprise,
> Have blundered into Paradise.
> In vasty dusk of life abroad,
> They fondly thought to err from God,
> Nor knew the circle that they trod ;
> And, wandering all the night about,
> Found them at dawn where they set out.
> Death dawned ; Heaven lay in prospect wid —
> Lo ! they were standing by His side."

There is a prophet who is very fierce and scornful over the fact that people who impudently neglect God at other times run to Him in their troubles. And it is shabby. Yet I wonder if that instinctive appeal to Him hurts God as much as His servant thinks. There is something very moving in the way an ill bairn, all its independence vanished, leans on its mother's love and care—must have her there, must see and feel and hear her, no one else will do, although at other times it is quite different—there is in that something that grips her heart. And when you pray, says Jesus, when you know that you have need of God, when life has grown too difficult without Him, when some hurt sends you to Him who alone can help you, say " Our Father," and be sure that Father loves to feel His sick bairn snuggle close against Him, loves to help.

In any case it is not easy to face life. Francis Thompson, for one, felt that these timid and agitated hearts of ours cannot but be disquieted in all the rush and pother, all the fears and possibilities among which we must walk ; that only Death can lay a cool hand upon our hot foreheads, and

lift the fever and the fretting from our anxious, boding, troubled spirits.

> "Here I untrammel,
> Here I pluck loose the body's cerementing,
> And break the tomb of life. Here I shake off
> The bur of the world, man's congregation shun,
> And to the antique order of the dead
> I take my tongueless vows; my cell is set
> Here in Thy bosom, my little trouble is ended
> In a little peace."

But to really religious people that seems weakly, is to them indeed just unintelligible. There is no need, says Christ, to withdraw out of the battle. For in the very thick and heart and press of it, with life flinging against you all it can, troubled, tried, tempted, you can have peace in your soul and valour in your spirit, and if you know Me, and have seen the God of whom I tell, and live in sight of Him, these things are certain to be yours.

And indeed, bold though it be, is not Christ's attitude towards life the only reasonable one? There come times when the road running on through the years crosses a little ridge; and at such places instinctively we stand a moment and look back and forward—back where the low setting sun lights up the way already travelled, the joys and sorrows, the rubs and disappointments, the successes and deliverances and achievements—that day that Death came to your door and pushed it open, and perhaps came in, or perhaps closed it again and went his way, and many another memory; and then we turn and gaze out ahead, but can't see much in that direction. For the mists lie thick and close, and set us wondering what they hide. And yet, looking at the facts of life so far, how do you feel about it? Judging by what you know and have experienced, how do you face the future? It used to be very fearfully that men looked towards it. For they had no sense of an order in things, no settled conviction of God's goodness. But theirs was a haphazard world, where anything might happen, and they felt frail

and helpless ; felt like a little knot of travellers in a wide prairie with only the black vault of heaven over them, and the huge spaces of darkness crowding in on them on every side, in which what fearsome things might even now be stealthily creeping nearer, be poised ready for the spring. "What's that ? " they whispered hoarsely, and huddled nearer to each other, crouching closer to the fire. How Christ has changed all that ! No one can overestimate the new sense of hominess the faith has brought into the world, even for those who do not hold it formally.

Once, speaking to a mass of men, scores of them unemployed and sick at heart, I happened to say that a great preacher had begun a famous sermon by remarking that the one thing absolutely certain in the future was temptation, and ventured to add that that, while a fine stoic saying, just left out the whole of Christianity, everything that Christ came to tell us. For, says He, there are things ahead of us more certain even than temptation, most sure although that is—the love of God to hearten us, and His presence to strengthen us, and His hand always there reached out to help us up all the steep places of the way. We can be certain about that. And at that the church burst suddenly into applause. And one looked proudly at men, facing their difficult lives so bravely. Yes, and happily across at Jesus Christ, as one turns eagerly toward somebody one loves, hearing him praised and honoured. It was not for nothing that You died. Here are men to whom what You did and said and were makes all the difference !

And don't you, too, feel like this poet ? Have not you also found that always God is very near, and that with Him there you can manage to face anything ? Is it not that your own life proves ? Coleridge no doubt maintained that experience is like the lamp hung at a vessel's stern, lighting up only what is past, but leaving all that lies ahead as dark as ever. Surely it is not so. " Days should speak, and years should bring wisdom." " It is a sorry fool," snaps Seneca, ' who has

nothing but his years to prove his age." He ought to have been learning something he can use. At the start faith was a daring venture. We looked at Christ's message, and it thrilled us. How beautiful, we said, if it be true! We must give it its chance to prove itself if it can. And after all these years of trial of it, how do you feel and what do you say? That valiant soul, Sir Henry Jones, in those gallant last lectures, delivered with difficulty because of the terrible ravages of a dread disease, protested against all this talk about the hazards of life, and declared roundly that what it teaches us most of all is that the universe is heartily upon the side of any one straining towards something better, and flings itself to his help. And reading from our own experience, do we not also feel that we can safely start from this that God is always very near, and always there to aid us?

After two generations in the wilderness, Moses turned to his people, and "all these forty years God has been with you, what have you lacked?" he asked. A bold challenge, surely, to such a mob of caitiff souls, for ever whimpering and snivelling and whining about something, thinking regretfully of the leeks and the garlic—well worth, they thought, the chains about their wrists—and casting lingering backward glances at a servitude that could offer prizes as rich as that. And yet daringly he hurls his question down before them: "What have you lacked?"

Lacked, you say, lacked? And your hands feel for what is no longer there, and your heart listens for voices that have fallen silent, and hears only the winds wailing drearily through empty places in your life. My God! the man dares to ask what I lack! I know. Even God cannot save us from the ordinary discipline and fate of life. These people, too, had known all that; had seen, they too, their dear ones die, and buried somewhere in the desert wastes, for who in that monotony of sameness could go back and stand beside a spot made sacred, and say it was here? There is an old-world higher critic—they say he was quite surely wrong, yet

certainly he was a man of genius—who stood to it and put it in the heading, that the ninetieth Psalm must be by Moses. An exquisite guess! How often these tired, footsore people, sick of wandering, had stood upon the borders of other happier nations with a country of their own, and settled ways, each of them with a home, and a path worn to it by his returning feet evening by evening! While they themselves were blown about the desert, like the desert sand, landless, empty-handed, homeless. And then they remembered God, and like a child ran to their Father's outstretched arms, and leapt to Him. "Lord, Thou hast been our home." Yes! they knew all the usual ills of life, sorrow and disappointment and the rest. And yet, says Moses boldly, what have you lacked? Where has God failed? What has He promised and not done? Where has His grace proved insufficient for the load you laid on it?

You will have tribulation, Christ conceded, more than most folk, if you are really Mine. For sorrow comes, He thinks, not always as a punishment, nor even as a discipline, but frequently as a reward. If a branch of the Vine bears fruit, and just because of that, the Husbandman will prune it, cutting it back to the raw quick, that it may bear more fruit. So thankfully did He accept the trials and the sorenesses of His own life. You will have tribulation, beyond doubt, but God will give you all you need to face it, bear it, see it through. You can count upon that.

Always in Scripture they keep telling how an angel came to deliver and strengthen and help. It was so even in Gethsemane. The disciples were admittedly drowsy and half asleep. We didn't see clearly, they confess. Yet when we failed Him, there was some one there. It must have been an angel! But a writer in the Old Testament knows better. Angel! he says, it was no angel that helped me, but very God of very God Himself! No other heart could have been half so tender, no other mind have understood so perfectly. It was His very arm that steadied me with

nothing less than Divine power. And have you, too, not found it so, that in every trouble God has been very near, a refuge and a stronghold, a hiding-place from the hot blasts and the choking, blinding dust-storms, the shadow of a great rock in a weary land? You have been tired, so very tired, that you looked hopelessly at the long, steep brae before you, mounting up so remorselessly day after day; and you could never manage it, you said. Yet you stand on the summit, looking back at a thing done. Loss came to you, and your heart cried out that you could not bear it! And yet somehow you have come through the tumbling of these icy waters, though at the time you felt each step must be your last. God's grace is like the manna, given day by day, for one day at a time, never for more but never for less, always enough for every new day as it comes. What have you lacked?

When Muhammad felt death drawing near, he faced the people, and asked if he owed anything to any one. "Yes, three coins to me, that you once borrowed to give away," a voice cried. "Let them be paid. Any one else?" he asked, and there was a long silence. "Have I failed any in my duty?" And they answered with a great shout, "You have not." So God stands forth and asks, Where have I failed you? What have I led you to expect, and nothing came of it? When have I left you to make such shift as you could alone? What have you lacked?

Lacked! you say, looking at the sheen of the wonderful promises, and then sorrowfully at your own poor, ordinary, unarresting life. I know. If that were all that Christ can do, then He has failed. But it is not all. And we know it is our own fault there is not far more to show, that we are even what we are only because our Lord has broken in to us almost against our will, that often grace has come and offered us great gifts that would have changed the whole contour and colour of our lives, and we refused them, didn't want them, wouldn't take them; and regretfully, after long and unheeded

knocking on the door, it had to turn away, often pausing even then to look back for a sign of opening. It is only because we push away Christ's gifts, because we are so sordidly content, because we say that we "are rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing," that we remain "wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked." For here is a Master whose grace is sufficient for every call upon it, as we ourselves have found, and whose strength is enough, however desperate any one may be. "My God can supply all your need," said one, who had tested Him as few ever did. Do not the actual facts of your own life make clear, asks this psalmist of the frightened, cringing crowds about him, that up till now, wherever you have been, always without exception, you have found God very near, not far away but there beside you, "daily taking your burdens on His shoulder," as one grateful heart acknowledges," a very present help in every time of trouble." And looking in your eyes he waits for your answer. Have you, he asks, or have you not? And your own soul cries out, loudly and with assurance, that you have. "To each of us individually," says Paul, "grace has been given, measured out with the munificence of Christ."

But, if that is so, then, says this poet, why grow fidgety? And he looked out with that strange calm of his at the approaching flames. If we have found that God is really able to do all that we can need, then why not trust Him? He may not give us what we want, but He will do far better, work out His own will for us; and, as Epictetus put it, "what Thou choosest for me is far better than what I could choose."

And surely it is true that if only we would soak our mind in that steady sense of God's presence and God's love and God's sufficiency, we would have come on the real cure for worry and anxiety and fear. We cannot tell what lies before us, but we do know this that every foot of the whole way God will be very near.

And to begin with, that means this, that there will be

much happiness before us. For He is lavish with it, heaps it up beyond all reason, so it often seems to us as we look at our rich possessions, and then at our deservings or rather at our lack of them. Paul could not understand God's generosity at all; and Christ says that He often wondered we were not continually staggered by it. And is it not a shame that we speak of the will of God in resigned voices as of something grey and bleak that we must brace ourselves to bear. All that we have worth having is God's will for us. He willed us into being. He willed this adorable earth; He willed this fascinating life that He has planned and worked out for us, crowding it with vivid interests; He willed to give us Jesus Christ. "This is the will of God, even your sanctification," that you grow like Christ. That is His dream for us, and He will never rest until for us and in us that best of all bests comes true. Where God is, there will be much happiness. So much, perhaps, that we will need to be upon our guard. For if adversity can sour, prosperity can ruin. And somehow in the sunshine it is very easy to miss God, to feel no need of Him, to forget about Him, to become flippant and light and giddy. But I will be there quite near to you, He says. Even if you forget, I will burst in on you somehow; even if you lose step with Me, I will recall Myself to your remembrance; even if you do get drawn away from Me, I will not leave nor fail you. You can count upon Me. That, then, is sure.

And, because we are human, sooner or later there is bound to be sorrow, and all those solemn things that we like to put out of mind, and perhaps wisely on the whole. For Henley was probably right in his savage answer to Whyte's glorious sermon on "forefancying your death-bed," that "there is nothing of which a brave and healthy man thinks less." "To-day," said Rainy, "I have a committee, to-morrow I preach, one day I shall have to die. Well, we must try to do each duty as it comes as well as we can."

Still, when they do come knocking at our door we may

think God has forgotten us. Ah, but that is impossible! Never dream that! That wild night on the lake, with the boat burying itself in the great seas slapping over it, and the wind a mad hurricane already, and rising every moment; the disciples knew it could not last. If only Christ were here, they thought. Why had He failed them, just when their need had leapt on them, and struck them down like this? And then—"What's that?" they whispered, clutching at each other fearfully. And their wet, tired faces suddenly grown white, they looked at one another. A spirit! It is death then, and there goes the sign of it! But Peter, who was peering out into the darkness, gave a sudden laugh of happiness. "It is the Lord," he cried; "it is the Lord!" How did he know? I think he had been watching for Him, had been sure that He would come, that He would never leave them face to face with death without finding some way of reaching them. And he was right. And if you also think sometimes that He has left you—well, He hasn't. Always you will find Him very near, never so near as when you need Him most.

And days may come when you, it may be, will lose touch with Christ, grow hard and cold and dead as any stone, impervious to all that He can do, unimpressed even by the Cross; when you will stand and stare at it and feel no thrill at all; will hear His voice, and know it is His voice, and say "I won't"; will know what He requires of you, and refuse flatly; will tire of home and fling away into a far country; will go mad, Christ says. Then, at least, you must lose Him. No! For even then and even there He will be very near. As Augustine heard God declaring, "You couldn't have sought Me, if you had not already found Me." And you too will come to yourself again, the madness will clear from your brain, home-sickness for God will spring up within you, nauseating you of the poor nothings with which you had tried to fill His place within your heart. And why will all that happen? Only because even in the far country you have

not escaped from God. But there too He has followed you, and even there is very near.

Or, again, some time or other there is death to face. Well, there was once a Persian poet who dreamed that the Judgment Day had come. Everywhere there were panic and confusion, and people rushing to and fro, praying the rocks to fall on them, the hills to cover them. Yet his own pulses he found beat quite normally and his heart felt no fear. "God," he said, "who has led me thus far will doubtless lead me still further," and waited unafraid. "When thou passest through the waters I will be with you." God's promise is still there, still very near.

And the beyond? There was a psalmist long ago who looked for a long time far out into the dark, and saw as little as we do. But of this he was sure, that we can never fall out of God's presence. "If I ascend up into heaven, behold Thou art there. Yea, even if I make my bed in the dark, horrible beyond, behold Thou art there"—even there, very near. And where God is, there are sympathy and love and care and goodness even toward the worst. For our death cannot change His nature, nor make Him whom we have found so marvellously kind suddenly grow hard and cruel and implacable. This God whom we have tried and proved and know will be our God for ever and ever. He will guide us even unto death—aye, and far past it, for as long as we have any being anywhere.

Aren't you forgetting God? this psalmist asked these frightened men, himself quite unafraid. Well, aren't you?

"From the bottom of my heart," wrote Luther to Melanchthon, "I am against those worrying cares which are taking the heart out of you. Why make God a liar in not believing His wonderful promises, when He commands us to be of good cheer, and cast all our care upon Him, for He will sustain us? Do you think He throws such words to the winds? What more can the devil do than slay us? Christ has died for sin once for all, but for righteousness and

truth He will not die, but live and reign. Why then worry, seeing He is at the helm? He who has been our Father will also be the Father of our children. As for me (whether it proceed from God's Spirit or from stupidity, my Lord Jesus knows), I do not torment myself about such matters."

No, it is not stupidity. That is the promised peace of God. That is Christ's gift accepted. And we might have it too, and face life with as steady eyes.

VIII

BUT WHEN LIFE TUMBLES IN, WHAT THEN? [1]

"If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?"—JER. xii. 5.

HERE is a man who, musing upon the bewilderments of life, has burst into God's presence, hot, angry, stunned by His ordering of things, with a loud babble of clamorous protest. It is unfair, he cries, unfair! And frowningly he looks into the face of the Almighty. It is unfair! And then suddenly he checks himself, and putting this blunt question to it, feels his heart grow very still and very cold. For after all, he asks himself, what is it you have to complain about so far? Nothing that everybody does not share. Only the usual little rubs and frets and ills of life that fall to every one, no more. And if these have broken through your guard, pushed aside your religion, made you so sour and peevish and cross towards God—God help you, what will happen when, sudden as a shell screaming out of the night, some one of the great crashing dispensations bursts in your life, and leaves an emptiness where there had been a home, a tumbled ruin of your ordered ways, a heart so sore you wonder how it holds together? If you have caught your breath, poor fool, when splashing through the shallow waters of some summer brook, how will you fare when Jordan bursts its banks, and rushes, far as the eye can see,

[1] This was the first sermon preached after my wife's dramatically sudden death.

one huge, wild swirl of angry waters, and, your feet caught away, half choked, you are tossed nearer and nearer to the roaring of the falls, and over it? Suppose that, to you as to Job, suddenly, out of the blue, there leap dreadful tidings of disaster, would you have the grit to pull yourself together and to face it as he did? "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord." Suppose that to you as to Ezekiel, that valiant soul, there comes a day when, with no second's warning, you are given the bleak message: "Son of man, behold I take away the desire of thine eyes at a stroke; yet neither shalt thou weep, nor let the tears run down. So I preached unto the people in the morning: and in the evening my wife died." Suppose that to you, as to Christ, it became evident that life was not to give what you expected from it, that your dreams were not to be granted, that yours was to be a steep and lonely road, that some tremendous sacrifice was to be asked of you, could you make shift to face it with a shadow of the Master's courage and the Master's calm? For there is no supposing in the matter. To a certainty to you too, in your turn, some day, these things must come.

Yes, unbelievably they come. For years and years you and I go our sunny way and live our happy lives, and the rumours of these terrors are blown to us very faintly as from a world so distant that it seems to have nothing to do with us; and then, to us too, it happens. And when it does, nobody has the right to snivel or whimper as if something unique and inexplicable had befallen him. "Never morning wore to evening but some heart did break"—hearts just as sensitive as yours and mine. But when yours breaks, what then? It is a bit late in the day to be talking about insurance when one's house is ablaze from end to end: and somewhat tardy to be searching for something to bring one through when the test is upon one. And how are you and I, so querulous and easily fretted by the minor worries, to make shift at all in the swelling of Jordan, with the cold of it

catching away our breath, and the rush of it plucking at our footing ?

Goethe, of course, tells us that all the religions were designed to meet us and to give us help, just there ; to enable us to bear the unbearable, to face the impossible, to see through with some kind of decency and honour what obviously can't be done at all.

But then so many people's religion is a fair-weather affair. A little rain, and it runs and crumbles ; a touch of strain, and it snaps. How often out at the front one lay and watched an aeroplane high up in the blue and sunlight, a shimmering, glistening, beautiful thing : and then there came one shot out of a cloud, and it crashed down to earth, a broken mass of twisted metal. And many a one's religion is like that. So long as God's will runs parallel to ours, we follow blithely. But the moment that they cross, or clash, that life grows difficult, that we don't understand, how apt faith is to fail us just when we have most need of it ! You remember our Lord's story of the two men who lived in the same village, and went to the same synagogue, and sat in the same pew, listening to the same services : and how one day some kind of gale blew into their lives, a fearsome storm. And in the one case, everything collapsed, and for a moment there were some poor spars tossing upon wild waters, and then, nothing at all. For that unhappy soul had built on sand, and in his day of need, everything was undermined, and vanished. But the other, though he too had to face the emptiness, the loneliness, the pain, came through it all braver and stronger and mellower and nearer God. For he had built upon the rock. Well, what of you and me ? We have found it a business to march with the infantry, how will we keep up with the horsemen : if the small ills of life have frayed our faith and temper, what will we do in the roar and the black swirl of Jordan ?

That has always been my chief difficulty about preaching. Carlyle, you recall, used to say that the chirpy optimism of

Emerson maddened him, Emerson across whose sheltered life no cloud or shadow was allowed to blow. He seemed to me, panted the other, like a man, standing himself well back out of the least touch of the spray, who throws chatty observations on the beauty of the weather to a poor soul battling for his life in huge billows that are buffeting the breath and the life out of him, wrestling with mighty currents that keep sweeping him away. It did not help. And I, too, have had a happy life: and always when I have spoken of the Gospel, and the love of God, and Christ's brave reading of this puzzling life of ours, it has seemed to me that a very easy answer lay ready to anybody's hand who found these hard to credit. Yes, yes, they might well say irritably, if I stood in the sunshine where you are, no doubt I, too, could talk like that! But if your path ran over the cold moors, where the winds cut and whistle and pierce to the very bone, if you were set down where I am, I wonder if you would be so absolutely sure? As Shakespeare says, it is not difficult to bear other people's toothache; but when one's own jaw is throbbing, that is another matter. We will listen to Jesus Christ: for He spoke from the darkness round the Cross. We mayn't understand Him, or agree with Him, or obey Him: but nobody can challenge His right to speak. But you! Wait till you stand in the rushing of Jordan, till to you there has come some fulfilment of that eerie promise, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate," and what will you say then?

I'll tell you now. I know that we are warned in Job that the most drastic test of faith is not even these tremendous sorrows, but a long purgatory of physical and mental agony. Still, I don't think that any one will challenge my right to speak to-day. And what I have to say is this: when Claverhouse suddenly shot Brown of Priesthill, he turned to the wife and asked, the callous brute, "What think you now of your braw guidman?" And she, gathering together the scattered brain, made answer,

"I aye thought muckle of him, but I think more of him now." I aye thought muckle of the Christian faith; but I think more of it now, far more. I have never claimed to understand many things in this perplexing life of ours, have always held that my dear master Browning went by much too far when he said confidently that for a Christian man there are no problems in the world or out of it. Surely the acknowledgment of God's love raises new problems. If love, then why and why and why and why? To me the essence of the faith has always seemed a certain intrepidity of loyalty that can believe undauntedly in the dark, and that still trusts God unshaken even when the evidence looks fairly damning. Do you think Christ always understood or found it easy? There was a day when He took God's will for Him into His hand, and turned it round, and looked at it. And, "Is this what You ask of Me?" He said; and for a moment His eyes looked almost incredulous. Aye, and another day when, puzzled and uncertain, He cried out, "But is this really what You mean that I should give You, this here, this now?" Yes, and another still, when the cold rushing waters roared in a raging torrent through His soul: yet He would not turn back, fought His way to the farther bank, died still believing in the God who seemed to have deserted Him. And that is why He is given a name that is above every name.

I do not understand this life of ours. But still less can I comprehend how people in trouble and loss and bereavement can fling away peevishly from the Christian faith. In God's name, fling to what? Have we not lost enough without losing that too? If Christ is right—if, as He says, there are somehow, hidden away from our eyes as yet, still there, wisdom and planning and kindness and love in these dark dispensations—then we can see them through. But if Christ was wrong, and all that is not so; if God set His foot on my home crudely, heedlessly, blunderingly, blindly, as I unawares might tread upon some insect in my path, have I not the right to be angry and sore?

If Christ was right, and immortality and the dear hopes of which He speaks do really lie a little way ahead, we can manage to make our way to them. But if it is not so, if it is all over, if there is nothing more, how dark the darkness grows! You people in the sunshine may believe the faith, but we in the shadow must believe it. We have nothing else.

Further, there is a grave saying in Scripture, "Receive not the grace of God in vain." That Christ should die on our behalf, that God should lavish His kindness on us, and that nothing should come of it, how terrible! And were it not pitiful if we receive the discipline of life in vain: have all the suffering of it, pay down the price in full, yet miss what it was sent to teach! I know that at first great sorrow is just stunned, that the sore heart is too numbed to feel anything, even God's hand. When his wife died, Rossetti tells us, he passed through all that tremendous time with a mind absolutely blank, learned nothing, saw nothing, felt nothing; so that, looking back, all he could say was that, sitting in a wood with his head in his hands, somehow it was photographed permanently on his passive mind that a certain wild flower has three petals. That was all. But by and by the gale dies down, and the moon rises, and throws a lane of gold to us across the blackness and the heaving of the tumbling waters. After all it is not in the day, but in the night, that star rises after star, and constellation follows constellation, and the immensity of this bewildering universe looms up before our staggered minds. And it is in the dark that the faith becomes biggest and bravest, that its wonder grows yet more and more. "Grace," said Samuel Rutherford, "grows best in the winter." And already some things have become very clear to me.

This to begin, that the faith works, fulfils itself, is real; and that its most audacious promises are true. Always we must try to remember that the glorious assertions of the Scriptures are not mere suppositions and guesses. There is

no perhaps about them. These splendid truths are flowers that human hands like ours plucked in the gardens of their actual experience. Why is the prophet so sure that as one whom his mother comforts so will God comfort all hurt things? How did the Psalmist know that those who are broken in their hearts and grieved in their minds God heals? Because, of course, it had happened to them, because they had themselves in their dark days felt His unfailing helpfulness and tenderness and the touch of wonderfully gentle hands. And it is true. When we are cast into some burning fiery furnace seven times heated, we are not alone, never alone; but there is One beside us, like unto the Son of God. When our feet slip upon the slimy stones in the swelling of Jordan, a hand leaps out and catches us and steadies us. "I will not leave you comfortless," said Christ. Nor does He. There is a Presence with us, a Comforter, a Fortifier who does strengthen, does uphold, does bring us through somehow from hour to hour and day to day. Pusey once wrote that when his wife died, he felt "as if the rushing waters were up to my chin; but underneath the chin there is a hand, supporting it." And that hand is there. And as the days go by, what grows upon one more and more is the amazing tenderness of God. Like as a father pitieth his children, mused a psalmist long ago. I have been wondering these days whether he too, poor soul, had suddenly, without one second's warning, to tell his children that their mother was dead, and that remembrance of that agony made him sure all his days it is not willingly that God afflicts and grieves us children of men. Anyhow that is true.

There is a marvellous picture in the National Gallery. Christ hangs upon the cross in a dense darkness; and at first that is all one sees. But, as one peers into the background, gradually there stands out another form, God's form; and other hands supporting Christ, God's hands; and another face, God's face, more full of agony even than our Saviour's own. The presence, the sufficiency, the

sympathy of God, these things grow very real and very sure and very wonderful.

Further, one becomes certain about immortality. You think that you believe in that. But wait till you have lowered your dearest into an open grave, and you will know what believing it means. I have always gazed up at Paul in staggered admiration when he burst out at the grave's mouth into his scornful challenge, his exultant ridicule of it, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" But now it does not seem to me such a tremendous feat: for I have felt that very same. True, I can tell him where death's sting lies. Ah! it is the constant missing of what used to be always here; the bitter grudging every second of the dear body to the senseless earth, the terrible insecurity, for one is never safe—anything, nothing, and the old overwhelming pain comes rushing back. Yet when the other day I took up a magazine, it was with amazement I discovered they are still chattering about whether we people are immortal or not. I am past that. I know. "I believe in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

But there is one thing I should like to say which I have never dared to say before, not feeling that I had the right. We Christian people in the mass are entirely unchristian in our thoughts of death. We have our eyes wrongly focused. We are selfish, and self-centred, and self-absorbed. We keep thinking aggrievedly of what it means to us. And that is wrong, all wrong. In the New Testament you hear very little of the families with that aching gap, huddled together in their desolate little home in some back street; but a great deal about the saints in glory, and the sunshine, and the singing, and the splendour yonder. And, surely, that is where our thoughts should dwell. I for one want no melancholious tunes, no grey and sobbing words, but brave hymns telling of their victory. Dante had a sour mind. Yet, as he went up the hill that cleanses him that

climbs, suddenly it shook and reeled beneath him. What's that ? he cried out in alarm. And his guide smiled. Some happy soul, he said, has burst through into victory, and every other on the mount is so praising God for that, that the whole hill rocks and staggers. And is not that the mood that best becomes us ? Think out your brooding. What exactly does it mean ? Would you pluck the diadem from their brows again ? Would you snatch the palms of victory out of their hands ? Dare you compare the clumsy nothings our poor blundering love can give them here with what they must have yonder where Christ Himself has met them, and has heaped on them who can think out what happiness and glory ? I love to picture it. How, shyly, amazed, half protesting, she who never thought of self was led into the splendour of her glory. As the old poet put it centuries ago,

> " Our sweet is mixed with bitter gall,
> Our pleasure is but pain,
> Our joys scarce last the looking on,
> Our sorrows still remain.
>
> But there they have such rare delights,
> Such pleasure and such play,
> That unto them a thousand years
> Doth seem but yesterday."

To us it will be long and lonesome : but they won't even have looked round them before we burst in. In any case, are we to let our dearest be wrenched out of our hands by force ? Or, seeing that it has to be, will we not give them willingly and proudly, looking God in the eyes, and telling Him that we prefer our loneliness rather than that they should miss one tittle of their rights. When the blow fell, that was the one and only thought that kept beating like a hammer in my brain. I felt I had lost her for ever, must have lost her, that to all eternity she must shine far ahead of me ; and my heart kept crying out, " I choose it, I choose it. Do not for my sake deny her anything." I know now

that I have not lost her. For love is not a passing thing one leaves behind. And is it not love's way to stoop?

And, after all, thank God, our gift is not an absolute one. When we are young, heaven is a vague and nebulous and shadowy place. But as our friends gather there, more and more it gains body and vividness and homeliness. And when our dearest have passed yonder, how real and evident it grows, how near it is, how often we steal yonder. For, as the Master put it: Where our treasure is, there will our heart be also. Never again will I give out that stupid lie, "There is a happy land, far, far away." It is not far. They are quite near. And the communion of the saints is a tremendous and most blessed fact.

Nowadays, for example, to pray is to turn home. For then they run to meet us, draw us with their dear familiar hands into the Presence, stand quite close to us the whole time we are there—quite close, while we are there.

And for the rest, many poets have told us of Lethe, the river of forgetfulness. But Dante, in his journeyings, came on another, the Eunoe, to taste the sunny waters of which is to have recalled all the gladsome and glorious and perfect things one has ever experienced. Eunoe runs beside the track all through the valley of the shadow; and a wise soul will often kneel, and lift a handful of its waters to his thirsty lips, and, ere he rises, wonderingly thank God for the splendour he has known, that never would and could have been at all but for His marvellous grace. And so back to life again, like a healthy-minded laddie at some boarding-school, who, after the first hour of home-sickness, resolves, if he is wise, he will not mope, but throw himself into the life about him, and do his part and play the game, and enjoy every minute of it, —aye, and does it too—though always, always his eyes look ahead for the term's end, and always, always his heart thrills and quickens at thought of that wonderful day when he will have not memories and letters only, but the whole of his dear ones really there, when he will be with them again

and they with him. Well, that will come in time. Meanwhile, "Danton, no weakness," as that brave soul kept muttering to himself on his way to the guillotine, and he showed none.

I don't think you need be afraid of life. Our hearts are very frail; and there are places where the road is very steep and very lonely. But we have a wonderful God. And as Paul puts it, what can separate us from His love? Not death, he says immediately, pushing that aside at once as the most obvious of all impossibilities.

No, not death. For, standing in the roaring of the Jordan, cold to the heart with its dreadful chill, and very conscious of the terror of its rushing, I too, like Hopeful, can call back to you who one day in your turn will have to cross it, "Be of good cheer, my brother, for I feel the bottom, and it is sound."

IX

ON THE CLUE TO LIFE'S ENIGMAS

"Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him: but we see Jesus."—HEB. ii. 8, 9.

LIFE was not easy to this writer; and, even with his gloriously valiant faith to help him, he never pretended that it was. There are mysteries that haunt, and enigmas that confuse and shake the soul, and dark, tremendous facts that must be faced and taken into full account in our reading of things. It is not a thoughtful or an honest or a sympathetic mind that is never staggered at times by "the burthen of the mystery, the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world," that never grows cold and shivery at the grim fact that, behind the quiet walls and placid faces, always there is hidden away that ghastly mass of pain and loneliness and sorrow, of breaking hearts and ailing spirits and bewildered lives, of frosted hopes that never opened, and glorious others that did bloom into so exquisite a loveliness that surely God Himself must have rejoiced in it with all His heart; and yet, out of the dark, there blew a fierce and sudden wind that touched it; and to-day there is only a sodden little heap of brown and withered petals, and an empty place where once a glory shone. And the great world rolls unconcernedly upon its way, and God seems not to notice nor to care; did nothing, at least, to avert it. It isn't religious, says Christ, to pass these things by with studiously averted head; and because

mud and blood and groaning men are so depressing, to pretend they are not there; to run up some cheap theory, and arbitrarily refuse to notice anything, however obvious and staring, that will not fit into our cosy facile views. These things are here, dreadfully real. And we must follow truth with loyalty wherever it may lead. And always the foundation virtue is sincerity.

And, surely, it is more than a little daunting to observe how often even great minds, brooding over these terrible problems of our life, lose nerve and balance, and become either sullenly cynical or else simply hysterical. For years Shakespeare seems almost maniacal in his blind hate of life, and his stinging contempt, his nausea indeed, of men and women. As Raleigh puts it bluntly, "he blasphemed the very foundations of life and sanity." And the belauded Russians, are they not immeasurably depressing, still underlining yet more heavily their dismal and reiterated finding that this life of ours is a stupendous bungle, crudely designed and clumsily constructed, a sad mistake upon the whole, much better blotted out? And Hardy, if on occasion a rare wintry gleam of very watery sunshine flickers for a moment on his sombre mind, had as a more settled mood the appalling conviction that there is no rhyme nor reason, no discernible plan or meaning, to be found in anything; that we are all in the power of an idiot God! How fearsome a nightmare of a thought! Ah! think of the vacant, imbecile, slavering face, the empty eyes, the aimlessly restless hands! A bleak reading of things, surely!

Yet always ecstatic voices keep telling us how deep and brave it is, implying by suggestion that sunnier views—our Lord's, for instance—are in comparison thin, shallow stuff; as if to say, "Christ! oh, well really, you know, Christ was no thinker! He never saw down to the depths of things as these sad, tortured spirits do." To pick up at random one instance of the thing, "Mr. Hardy read a purposelessness

into history which the majority of his readers had not the courage even to consider." Now what exactly does that mean? A thing is true or it is false: and if true, then we must accept it at all costs. But how is it braver to assert dogmatically, and with a ferocious emphasis, that this earth is the sheerest chaos of a place; a wild flurry of blown snow, a howling of mad tempest, in which we, poor helpless souls lost in these endless arctic wastes, with our frostbitten feet, can only wander round and round with aimless limping steps, till we lie down and die, are covered over and forgotten somewhere in the blizzard, having reached nowhere, having achieved nothing, having exhausted ourselves in what from the first was doomed to be a hopeless, fruitless, impossible quest—how is that braver than to face the same life, to bear the same agonies, and yet, even when hurt most sorely, and when things are darkest, to see a plan, a mind, a loving-kindness in it all, so that it never occurs to one to whimper or rail at the ordering of things, but, like Pompilia in her torture,

> "Let us leave God alone;
> Why should I doubt He will explain in time?"

Surely, intellectually, that is the more daring reading of the two by far. While, as to the effect upon the human spirit, measured in terms of bravery, can there be any question as to which gives the more gallantry of bearing? "I will always think the man who keeps his lip stiff," says Stevenson, "and 'makes a happy fireside clime,' and carries a pleasant face about to friends and neighbours, infinitely greater (in the abstract) than an atrabilious Shakespeare." It is not really a courageous thing to sit in a circle like a pack of wolves, and howl to the heavens, determined that the whole earth will know that we are cold and hungry, and mightily offended because our wishes are not the laws of the universe, and life will not run our way—like poor bewildered Lear: "They told me I was everything; 'tis a lie; I am not ague-proof." The poor old shivering, maddened

soul! And yet the fact remains that a touch of religion would have made a man of him, enabled him to face his life with honour, ague and all. In the nursery a child that keeps continually breaking out into a wild, self-centred, passionate hullabaloo because it doesn't like the pudding, or because its game has not been chosen, or because the others rather roughly push it about, is universally regarded as an intolerable nuisance, and set in the corner until it has gained some modicum of decent self-control. But the howling cry-babies of literature are petted and belauded, and ecstatic disciples follow them about, clasping their hands, and rolling their eyes, and chorusing, "How deep! how wonderful!" Yet even if things were as bad as they say, is it necessary to make all that outcry? There is an old Chinese poet, Ta'o Chien, who gives us with detail some admirable rules for life, the last of which runs thus:

> "And when it is time to go—go,
> And make as little fuss about it as you can."

But these good souls have never a thought of going, and they make an endless fuss. Brave! Shakespeare or no Shakespeare, all his evil years he was a whimpering poltroon compared with any ordinary Christian man, the simplest soul among them. For when pain and sorrow and death knock at his door, he opens to them with a steady hand, receives his awesome visitors with a quiet dignity; and, though his heart within him may be breaking, picks up his life again, and puts it through with steadfast loyalty, and night by night faces the eerie, empty loneliness with never a murmur nor complaint. And why? Because he believes that what befalls him is not "purposeless"; holds that this "unintelligible world," confusing, dark, half mad although it may often seem, is not really "unintelligible." Did not Wordsworth, in that very passage, add that when we think it is we are not seeing down to the "life of things"? Because, stunned and staggered and reeling in mind, he still

believes among the sudden ruins, and still trusts in the utter dark. "What shall we do, Enobarbus?" cries the anxious Cleopatra. "Think and die." A noble answer! Yet the simplest Christian, thinking deeper thoughts, will not throw up his hands like that, in abject surrender to untoward things. He thinks, and dares to live.

Deeper! For the New Testament is at once the bravest and most honest book by far in the whole world. Talk about facing the dark facts of life! What are the Gospels? They are the record of an utter failure, as men judged; they are the grim story of a gallant heart that met with little except infamy, rejection, gathering disappointments, almost absolute desertion, and a horrible end; they are the tale of a most hideous and successful crime; always there falls across the page the ghastly shadow of a cross. Facing the facts of life! For sheer tragedy, even *Othello* and *Hamlet* are thin superficial readings of the mere surface of things, compared to this heart-staggering book. And this is not simply superb imagination rioting among the worst we can conceive. All this was lived: a sensitive heart like ours, Christ's heart, bore that. Must He not know the worst there is to know of the sore discipline of things as these soured spirits never did? Shakespeare retired upon a competence; Hardy amassed a fortune; Jesus Christ was crucified! Facing the facts of life indeed! Who ever has done that like Him, or has such right to speak as He?

Or turn to the Epistles, and where in all literature will you find so haunting a metaphor, so tremendous a realization of the agony that seems as yet woven into the stuff of things, as Paul's amazing conception of all creation as a helpless captive, bound and tortured, sitting in an intolerable pain, or one it can just bear, gazing with almost maddened eyes for the deliverer who surely must come some day? And still along the empty roads there is no sign of him!

And in this very passage does not this writer tell us that, as he looks out on life, he has an eerie sense that things

have somehow been arrested, that God's dreams have not worked out as yet? Everywhere there are plain indications that man is planned to be a sovereign being, an august creature with all things put in subjection to him, wearing the very sun as diadem, treading the very stars like unconsidered dust beneath his feet. But as things really are as yet, he is so frail, so helpless, so open to assault, so liable to be rushed by things too strong for him. It all looks like failure, and as if the whole magnificent design had tumbled into ruins.

And yet this writer's eyes, seeing all that so certainly, are unafraid. And why? Mark well the reason; for it, too, is a stupendous thing! You have seen childish ploys in which a picture is cut into a confused jumble of jagged pieces, each with tortuous edges. And for long, any one trying to fit the thing together can make nothing of it all, can find no clue, no start, until two fragments piece into a growing whole, and suddenly one gets enough to hint at, and betray, the entire design. Or, there was once a language that had been entirely blotted from men's memory, buried thousands of years deep in the sands of oblivion. And when men came on tablets inscribed in these unknown letters, they were mere soundless sounds and unintelligible hieroglyphics, conveying nothing to a single mind. Until one scholar, poring over them, caught at a hint, and following it discovered the whole lost alphabet, and built up the entire dead tongue; and now men read its literature again. So, as this writer gazed about him in perplexity and with a furrowed forehead at this difficult, confusing mystery of a life of ours, suddenly a light broke in on him, and his face cleared, and his heart saw enough to follow fearlessly what he knew was the Ariadne's thread which he was sure would lead in time out of the mazes and perplexities on to the meaning and the goal. "We see not yet all things put under him, but—we see Jesus"; and, seeing Him, have found the clue, the key, the motive in God's mind, aye, and the power that will work out His plans to glorious realities.

Was there ever a more marvellous tribute even to Jesus Christ than that? Here is this vast ailing world, so full of much that staggers and confuses. And because this Jesus lived His brief life in an obscure corner of it nineteen hundred years ago, and spoke words most of which have been completely lost, and died that horrible death that was His fate, myriads of men and women all the ages since have faced their difficulties, and are doing it to-day, with a new sanity, and a new courage, and a new understanding that sees enough to keep them cool and brave. If only, cries Browning in a famous passage, if only you can see Jesus, if only you think Him out, if only you grasp what He means, your problems are ended and life grows clear. Well, not quite clear. Much even yet may be dark to understand and sore to bear; but we see Jesus, and that is enough, have stumbled on the clue, have found the meaning.

But how does to meet Jesus Christ make so immense a difference? To begin with, there are the futilities in life, or what look like futilities, and the gross, senseless cruelties, or what look like gross cruelties seen from our human angle, so much that comes to little or to nothing at all—all that sets one crying Why, and why, and again why?

Very dramatic is the answer of the faith. It does not shirk, or try to hide these ghastly facts away; it does not seek to minimize them or cover them over with flabby and dishonest explanations that don't help, but madden. It listens to the end to all these railing voices can object. And is that all? it says. But there is worse, far worse, than that in life; things vastly grimmer, hugely more incomprehensible. Look! it says, look! and sets us down before the Cross of Christ! And when, shrinking, we would fain cover our eyes and slip away and forget that awful horror, Take down your hands, it cries, and face the facts. That is the noblest soul by far that ever breathed upon this earth, and that is what God did with Him: that is the best life ever lived, and that is how it ended. Look! And surely,

as we look, the only reasonable course is to conclude that this world is a raving madhouse, to curse God, and die.

But the faith bids us wait; and, as we watch, a marvel happens. For it is there, in that gross darkness, that there rises that Light of the World that has ever since enabled men to pick their way. And it is these pale, dying lips that have convinced innumerable souls that God is Love! And it is there, upon the scene of that horrible tragedy, that a new thing appeared upon the earth that has ennobled humanity, as all the thousand others God had tried had, all together, failed to do—a motive that proves irresistible, pulling us up toward better things; a passion stronger even than patriotism, deeper than love itself; a power that is lifting the whole earth nearer and nearer God. And how else could it have been born? Till, standing there within the shadow of the Cross on Calvary, and looking round us at the marvellous results that have flowed out from that, huge bungle as we thought it, we become much less sure of our confident criticisms. "The foolishness of God," cries Paul, flinging that terrific phrase into the sneering faces round him, "is wiser than men." Could your adroit schemes, and your superior wisdom, and your so clever plans ever have achieved what this daft tale of mine, this crazy story, this impossible absurdity has done? Look for yourselves and see!

And with that light begins to break in on the darkness; and other things too, that had staggered, that seemed palpably cruel and wrong, grow less obscure, and we can sense the outline of their meaning, like shapes that loom up dimly amid mist. If our own lives are emptied, and our own hopes withered, and our own hearts tried and torn, we stoop and take the poor crushed thing into our hand, and look up at the Cross, and back to it again. And if God has wrought out such marvellous things through that, this also is not purposeless, we say, and this too has a meaning that will grow clear in time, and doggedly we clench our hands

and bear. As yet we do not understand, but we see Jesus, and have caught the clue. A psalmist once looked up into God's face and said, Dark and mysterious though your dealings with me are, I will not say one word. It is all black and puzzling to my mind. But, since Thou doest it, I will not open my lips, nor break into a foolish babble of complaining against the All-wise. Some plan there is in this, and for my part I will keep resolutely dumb until it dawns on me. So, standing beside the Cross, we learn enough to keep us, at the dark times of our own life, silent, acquiescent, still, trustful of God.

And that largely because we learn there that He is beside us in the dark. What used to fret men's spirits raw and sore was that they did not know that, thought of God as lolling at His ease out in the sunshine, high above the fogs and bitter damps of life where we were urged by Him to struggle and bear and suffer. But now they know He is not out of it; but in it, deeper in it all by far than we. Whoso sees Jesus Christ grows sure of that. They watched Him giving Himself for others He had never seen before, spending His life eagerly with both full unresting hands. And God too is like that, must be like that, they said with an assured conviction; He too has hands that leap out in kindness, and a heart that sympathizes, and a touch how tender and compassionate. They looked up at that anguished figure on the cross; and that is how God is affected by it all, so hurt by our sins, so agonized until this needy world is saved and healed and glorified. When Christianity swept men's hearts it was largely because it made them sure that God was in the suffering, was bearing it along with them; that when we are called to face pain or sacrifice we are not asked to go alone; but always there are two of us—and the other is God.

Sir Oliver Lodge throws all his soul into a passionate passage that cries aloud that, though philosophers may scoff, what the human heart demands, and what, blessed be God's

name, it finds in Christ, is a God who can yearn and love and sympathize and suffer. Yes, suffer! Ah, with what suffering! Can the insect with its dull insensitiveness ever begin to understand the agony of a man's breaking heart? I know that God foreknows all things; I know, unlike our puzzled and bewildered minds, He sees the end from the beginning; I know for Him there is no time nor space, no now and no hereafter. And yet and yet, how He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and how He is afflicted in all our afflictions only those know who have been in it with Him. It was no angel, cries a tried soul in the Old Testament, who helped me through my evil days, but God's own very presence. No hand but His could have had a touch so understanding and so steadying. Don't talk to me, He says; I know. And, standing by the Cross, we also know.

And must it not be so? Ask Science, and it proves the higher that life rises in the scale of being the wider grow its sympathies and the sorer do they hurt; the more does love mean sacrifice and suffering. And to us too, as to St. Francis that tremendous night of fearsome vision, it comes home upon Calvary that life at its fullest, its completest, its divinest, is an agony till pain is finished and sin destroyed, and the last wandering soul safe home. Have you seen Jesus? Then you know what God is like, know what God is, know that the ordering of things lies in hands that were pierced for you and me, that we can safely trust. And with so wonderful a God beside you, feeling Him there, with His hand gripping yours, certain, as surely after Calvary we must be certain, that He will never leave you, but will go all possible lengths, whatever be the cost to Him, to bring you through, however dark things be, however difficult it is to understand, however sore to bear, hasn't it grown far easier, and far less "unintelligible"? For you have seen down to "the life of things," have come upon the clue?

Yes, but Francis went far further; and so must we. For a whole night he brooded on that vision, that discovery

of the essential being of God ; and next day they found upon his hands and feet the print of the nails, the marks of utter fellowship with Christ, visible symbols that he was crucified with Him, and was to live his life in Jesus' way, with a like eager passion of unselfishness and sympathy and service. And so must you and I. If we see Jesus we shall learn what life is for, why it is given us, and what we are meant to do with it. All the old obvious purposes for it will fade out as impossible ; and we shall find ourselves in a new world. You're not thinking of selling your life ! cries Carlyle in amazement. Why, man, you can't. For what is there big enough to be worth that price ? The only thing to do with life is to give it away, like Jesus Christ, and like that living love that we call God. And you can ; and you must. God looks to you, depends on you, created you that He might have your help, not in some unimportant nothing but in what lies nearest His heart,—His saving of the world ! Is that the meaning of it all, you cry ? Yes, that's the meaning, and it's great news.

For have you never envied Jesus His Gethsemane ? When some dear life hung in jeopardy, or when an operation had to be performed, and there came that sickening moment when the other had to go into the Valley of the Shadow, and you passed out into a horrible safety—have you never hated yourself then for your rude health and crude, brutal wellness ? Have you never run to God, railing against Him, crying with passion that it was not fair, that He was in it with that other ; and "I—I who have my rights as well as You —am here, shut out ; I who would gladly take her place and suffer for her ; I whose pleasure and whose duty that is !" And with that, all sense of seemliness swept from you, you kept shaking at the door, and battering upon it, crying vehemently, "Let me in ! Let me in ! Let me in !" But there came back no answer.

Ah ! but you are not shut out of the saving of the world. Christ, says this writer, is not a solitary uniqueness, save only

in degree. He is the creator of a new order of beings like Himself, "the first-born among many brethren," and you are meant to be one of them—all bearing the family likeness, all living their lives in the brave, big, characteristic, Christ-like way. What, asks Paul, is it that creation in its agony is expecting? Why does it start, and lift its head, and listen, with hope lighting its eyes? It is waiting for the coming of the sons of God; waiting for you and me, waiting for people who will live in Jesus' way, and show Christ's heroism and unselfishness towards God and man in all their thinking, all their planning, all their living of their common days.

And they who have seen Jesus have to try to do it. For any other life has grown too tame and purposeless and tawdry for their hearts to endure. Why, even genial old Chaucer, found unexpectedly among the prophets, bursts out to decent people settling down to the usual mean little ways, and unambitious hopes:

> "Here is no home; here is but wilderness.
> Forth, pilgrim, forth! Up, beast! out of thy stall!
> Know thy country, look up, thank God for all!
> Hold the high way, and let thy spirit thee lead,
> And truth thee shall deliver, there is no dread."

And he who has seen Jesus has to rise and go, taking the high way of the Cross.

I wish that you could see Him here to-day! Or have you seen Him, and turned carelessly away back to the dusty little nothings of the world, not interested nor impressed nor won? Ah, surely not! For that were the last proof of your own littleness and poverty of soul! Even here, even now, pushing and pressing, can't you see Him? Push, man! Push! For nothing matters half so much as this! And this, perhaps, is your best chance; and none so good may ever come again. And if you catch a glimpse of Him at all—oh, life may still be dark and difficult enough at times on to the very end; and, God knows, there are things that clutch with cold hands at the heart. But we have got

the clue, have found the key, have seen down "to the life of things," can understand God and this baffling life of ours enough to follow quietly "until the day dawn and the shadows flee away." We have seen Jesus, and our souls rise up and cry, "Leave God alone! Why should I doubt He will explain in time," and that our hearts will justify Him where it now is darkest, and thank Him even for what hurt most cruelly?

X

WHAT CHRIST MEANS BY A GOOD MAN

MATTHEW v. 17–48.

WHAT are we to make of these arresting sayings? People who ignore Christ as an idle dreamer of still idler dreams can irritably push them aside as on the face of them impossible, and not worth considering. For life, so they object, cannot be lived in that quixotic fashion, flinging oneself at windmills, and tilting at the whole set of the world. And so they fold their hands and settle down complacently in the conventional ways, as if these were as inevitable as the laws of Nature. But that won't do for men and women who profess to take Christ seriously, and to have made His mind their guiding star. For us to skip all this, and turn to something soothing and heartening like the prodigal or some of the rich promises, conveniently forgetting this uncomfortable and upsetting teaching, is deliberately and impudently to disobey One whom we call the very Word of God; to look Him in the eyes and tell Him that He knows nothing about life, and that we are not going to be made fools of by Him or anybody else; to set our jaws squarely and doggedly and answer, "I will not."

Yet what are we to do? Here are we set down to live in this very definite kind of a world; and here too, obstinately, are these sayings of Christ which don't seem to fit into it at all, that look flatly impracticable, so that, quite early, glosses were slipped into the later manuscripts to break the force of the wind. "Whosoever is angry," said Christ bluntly.

"Without a cause," inserted a lame soul unable to keep up with Him. And indeed they are thrown down in the most arresting way without any qualifications, even such as our Lord Himself practised in the living of His own life; and sometimes with a noisy clashing of part against part, so that it is not easy to piece the whole into a consistency within our dull and prosy minds which, in their pedantic fashion, ask for little invariable rules and a full code of minute by-laws, and are given instead, much to their discomfiture, mighty principles which we are left to apply for ourselves; and that through the exercise, not only of loyalty and faithfulness, but of common sense and courage and a sense of proportion and even of humour. Newman went over to the Church of Rome largely because it told him definitely what to believe and what to do, took the ordering of things away from him, and so saved him from the turmoil of uncertainty in his own mind, and the bother and the danger of decision. But resolutely Christ insists on treating us, not as babes in leading strings, but as grown men and women. Here is the mind of God, He says, here also is your life; and, with the help of God and all the aids He has contrived for you, you must take that first and work it out into the stuff and pattern of this other with your own hands.

And the difficulty with which the Sermon on the Mount confronts us is just this, that nowhere is the immense originality of our Lord's bewildering mind more visible and staggering. For thousands of years we have been climbing towards Him, been peering up at Him, been teasing and fingering at the edges of His teaching. And yet His is still so lonely a soul that, when even now He says these things to us, we look up at Him puzzled and dumbfoundered and not at all certain whether He is serious or not. He is. And our plain business as Christian people is twofold. We must with care avoid a wooden literalness, that might easily enough miss the whole spirit of what He lays upon us. That first, that very certainly. Surely, for instance, there is a

very obvious distinction between wild asseverations in our common speech and an oath in the law courts, which last our Lord Himself once took. That practice enjoined upon us there may not be flattering to our veracity, may openly hint doubts which we may find insulting. Yet surely looking to the fact that the Law deals with weighty and momentous issues, that life itself may be at stake, it is bound to take all possible precautions to ensure that it is founding, not upon fictions or mere suppositions, but on facts and truth. There too, no doubt, that precaution "comes of evil," in the sense that it has been made necessary by human depravity, and in an ideal world would cease to be required. But, as things are, what can we do?

Yet if a stodgy and unimaginative literalness is to be avoided, even more must we see to it that we are not simply leaving these disquieting laws of Christ upon one side, but are really endeavouring to work them into the practical living of our lives. It won't do to say, as a Prime Minister did not long ago, that obviously the State cannot be run upon the lines of the Sermon on the Mount. If we are not prepared to follow what we admit to be Christ's teaching both as a nation and as individuals, then why call ourselves Christians at all? "Have you taken the name of Christ," asked Leighton long ago, "on purpose to dishonour it?"

This at least is clear that in these sayings we have a picture of the humanity of the future. For if anything is certain it is this—that any real advance that is to be will be along the lines of Jesus Christ. It is amazing how already He has moved to the centre of things, has Himself become the centre of things. For consider the astonishing facts! Here is One who was hustled to His death as a bad man, as One whose character and teaching were polluting the people's minds and morals, so that the authorities felt they must at all costs take the most drastic action. Yet now if anybody asks, "But what is goodness?" the inevitable answer is, and must be, look at Jesus Christ. Even in non-

Christian India their highest adjective of admiration is Christlike. He was condemned as a blasphemer. People clapped quick horrified hands to outraged ears at the dreadfulness of His views of God. It was just shocking, so they said with unanimity. Yet now the one thing certain is that, if there be a God at all, He is Christ's God and is Himself like Jesus Christ. As a distinguished Anglican divine has put it, "To-day people are not worrying about the deity of Christ, but they are immensely interested in the Christlikeness of God." In His own day His practice and teaching as to the Sabbath, the Scriptures, the grace of God, a score of things, seemed horribly immoral. But now we are learning that they are the only possible truths, have found that to be right we must follow with exactness in Christ's steps. So far we have slowly penetrated into His originality. But there are still infinite deeps in it we have not yet begun to sound, as these sayings now before us and the shock they give us prove. Yet these, too, are true: and one day others will look back at us, counting us hardly Christian in any full sense at all, wondering how we could have missed, or been stumbled by, elements of the Master's will which by their day will have become accepted as the only possibility, and the obvious way of things.

The fact is there have been two main forks in the tree of life. The one was when the animal and vegetable kingdoms separated. The latter had an easier and prettier road to much quicker results. And very glorious these are—the stateliness of trees, the greenness of grass, the loveliness of flowers. But along that line progress was arrested and came to a halt. The other took a road that looks uglier and more squalid through carnage and competition and blood, but it has climbed far higher to the graces of self-sacrifice and love, and all the glories of humanity. The second all-decisive fork is Christ or not Christ. Turn your back on Him, and you may and will reach many wonderful things. Comfort and mechanical efficiency and a hugely

interesting world—all this and much more are still open to you. But if you want to climb as high as soul, you must take Christ's way and follow Him. The road is steeper, the toil is harder, but the results are far more glorious. And if we refuse what we know to be Christ's will, we are taking the downhill path to degeneracy and decay and death ; or at the least to an arresting of all higher progress. The man depicted in the Sermon on the Mount is the man of the future.

There are those, no doubt, who deny this ; maintaining that this teaching is not of the future but is fly-blown and antiquated and out of date, carried to our modern bustling world like a dying echo from a primitive day when life was immeasurably more simple than it is now ; and the complexity of our society and the intricacy of our problems had not risen on men's minds, and every one had time to be cool and courteous and considerate. This, they argue in effect, is legislation that might work in some small family clan, but nowadays the thing is utterly and hopelessly impossible.

For myself I resent that bland assumption that would dismiss Christ a little superciliously as One who came out of a small time, and whose mind and teaching are coloured by the smallness of His environment. Historically it has not a statable case. For the disconcerting fact is that nearly all our problems seem old almost as humanity itself. Always the Haves have grasped too much, and always the Have-nots are growling angrily against the Haves ; always there is the same raw soreness, always the hurt sense of rank injustice and ill-usage and a bitter grievance against life, always the crowding and the competition and the rest of it, just as to-day. And Christ lived in a world which in essence was quite bewilderingly like our own, and among men and women whose hearts were strikingly akin to our hearts now. Our lofty attitude towards those old days and to the Master's teaching that came out of them is silly enough. Robertson Nicoll was once guilty of an outrageous libel on a distinguished scholar whom I refuse to name,

declaring that he "thinks Jesus Christ quite a good fellow and well-meaning, but of course not nearly so clever as Sandy Blank." There are people who give that impression. And yet somehow these moderns who presume to talk down to Christ and to shove Him aside as out of date, on the basis of their alleged fuller knowledge of life and the larger world in which we live, don't look bigger or cleverer or wiser than He! Rather, one blushes hot for those who have no notion what clumsy, blundering, gawky souls they really are in Jesus' presence.

If Christ followed the tradition upon any subject, then be sure that that was not merely tradition but the law of God. And if Christ, with deliberation and not hesitating to pay down the whole cost of His audacity, broke with the prevailing views, as on the sanctity of marriage, or with the unanimous prophetic custom, as on the drink question, and took a startlingly new and lonely road of His own, the Church resiles from that originality of His and goes back to the old ways He discredited, or to the prophetic views which He discarded, as to a quicker and truer and more thorough plan, at its own peril, aye, and at that of many generations.

Take the instance given here, that of divorce. In our Lord's day that was granted easily on many grounds; any mere incompatibility of temper, any roving of desire, was often held to be enough. And Christ daringly laid it down that only one reason was valid. And how much of decency and moral uplift the world owes to that. Yet nowadays a popular view is to talk disparagingly of His ruling as of a quaintly old-fashioned notion which the modern world has quite outgrown and definitely left behind. The United States considers itself a Christian nation, yet blatantly it pays little or no attention to Christ's mind upon this subject. What does it matter what He held? We know far better nowadays! And so with open eyes they have gone back to the very kind of thing from which He lifted us. It is easy fastening on vivid and dis-

tressing cases to build up a plea. Is a woman to be tied for life to a drunkard or a criminal or a lunatic ? That is, indeed, a fearsome fate. And yet society must come before the individual. And where the sanctity of the marriage tie is loosened, civilization crumbles. " For better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness or in health," that is a covenant touched by the glow and splendour and chivalry of love. But to make a business contract which, if it does not pay us dividends in comfort big enough to please us, we immediately dissolve, that is not to pass ahead of Christ, but to slip far below the level that He set us. The full flowering time of His teaching in the world is not over and past ; it lies still far ahead.

Yes, but it is not enough for us to look eagerly forward, and sing, " It's coming yet for a' that," with a thrill in our heart, and a huzza in our voice, and so, envying the happy people of the time to be, settle down meantime in our own ways as the one possibility for us as yet. We too must work these sayings here and now into our hearts and lives. And how ?

What strikes me first about this new righteousness is the honouring claims Christ makes upon us. That is what nowadays most thrills me in the Gospels. Not, as was once the case, the promises, but the demands, the glorious assumptions, the fact that looking at us He pitches things so high. " What do ye more than others ? " He turns to us and asks. For He expects that Christian people will in any company move to the front by right : that as at the War men slipt by natural selection and a kind of inescapable inevitableness into their fitting places, and he who could lead did lead, and he who could not, fell in behind, as a matter of course, and followed, so Christian folk will by the nature of things prove themselves bigger and braver and wiser and more unselfish in the living of their lives than others.

And that for two reasons. First, because they have an instinct that fastens on what matters, and concentrates mainly on that, and sets lesser things into their due or secondary

place. To-day many people boast that they are so busy carrying out the gospel in social reform that they have no time to be bothered with the mere rites of religion. And they say it not at all ashamed, but quite convinced that they are farther on than those who still waste time about the Churches and the like. And Christ looks at them, gravely considering them. You are in the kingdom, He says at last, but just in it—" the least in it," nothing more. And, on the other hand, there are those whose energy and thought are concentrated solely upon matters of ritual and so on, who are tremendously in earnest over these, quite staggeringly so indeed. Shall we say upon early communions, and fasting, and the like? And Christ declares with emphasis that if that is all they have to show they are not in the kingdom at all. The righteousness I claim, He says, is something more than that. The real Christian, so He tells us, has a balance of mind that uses means as means, and ends as ends, and does not grow confused between the two, but puts them each in its own fitting place.

And, further, he has something of his Master's eagerness to use his life with thoroughness and for the biggest things. Browning tells of a soul dragged forward like a conscript " out of the glad, safe rear into the dreadful van." But where there is sacrifice to be made, and danger to be faced, the Christian leaps forward, always volunteering, always first. So Christ expected, and yet is it so with us? " Sacrifice! " we say, drawing back, not liking the look of the dreadful van, preparing to slink into the safe, glad rear again. " But," we stammer in confusion, " I thought the whole point of this faith was that through it one gets off, that less will do, that in view of this grace of God toward us we need not worry as we used to do, nor mind nearly so much how we live, for He will get us through somehow. Isn't it so? I understood that the Cross means that the moral laws are in some way to swerve aside in our favour, that an exception in their working is to be made on our behalf, that a poor life with Christ will be

accepted in place of a fine life without Christ." Well, it doesn't. Not so did they understand it in the New Testament. Rather they caught infection from their Master's chivalry. If Christ carried His cross, then so must I; if He gave His life, here is mine too. The faith is not an opiate but a spur, an inspiration, a compulsion to do more, far more than we had ever seen before to be our duty. The whole meaning of the thing is to create a world at last of spirits like Christ, flinging their lives away for God and others in His joyous and unreckoning way; and you and me among them. And if we don't wish that, then Christ is not for us.

And then there is the almost dreadful inwardness of this new righteousness. Law is a crude makeshift affair. It deals only with what is overt. Conduct, and what is written down, and words before credible witnesses, these are its sphere, but beyond that it cannot press into what a man is in the hush and hidden places of his own private heart. But all the great religious teachers follow us into these remote fastnesses, past conduct and past words and down into the secrecy of thought. "Thought," says a Buddhist, "that mysterious essence of being." And so indeed it is. It is difficult to credit that a solid piece of matter, a dour lump of a thing, is in reality no lump, but is composed of endless mobile electrons in perpetual motion. And all this busy life about us is built up of that airy insubstantial substance, always forming in these brains of ours that we call thought, as certainly as all the vivid pageantry of his dreams and the long procession of his characters were fashioned within Shakespeare's mind. And thus if one wishes really to change and cleanse the world, one must get back to thought, the final material out of which life is woven. That is why legislation, which deals only with outward things, is, and must be, so inadequate; why politicians are at best mere fumbling amateurs; why in the last resort we must rely upon God's prophets who dig deeper and push

matters farther back, and strive to change, not our environment alone, but our innermost selves. For nothing less will serve. If a river runs foul and polluted through a city, it is nothing like enough to prevent the factories within its bounds from disgorging refuse into the waters. When that is done, the cure may prove to be no cure, and the stinking yellow scum may still float past, breeding disease. You must get powers to start far farther back, and deal with the pollutions at the river's source. So here. Because, as Browning has it,

> "I am ware it is the seed of act
> God holds appraising in His hollow palm,
> Not act grown great thence on the world below,
> Leafage and branchage vulgar eyes admire."

And so our Lord, lighting a candle, takes us down into the dusty little-visited recesses of our hearts. Conduct, He says, that's little; let us probe much farther in. You have not murdered. Are you sure of that? Look at your hands again! Is not that blood on them? If you have hated any one, or been angry with any one, that itself ranks as murder, as I judge. If you have been contemptuous to any even in thought, have "sniffed at him" so the word seems to mean, there is no penalty that you do not wholly deserve. If looking down upon a man of lesser chance and smaller education you have said or thought, You stupid! even the flaming of Gehenna were not too dreadful for a heart like yours! So Christ says, and He means it, and He is to be our Judge. Truly if these be His standards for us, and if this is what He calls sin, "if He should mark iniquity, who could stand?"

And yet He passes deeper yet, past thought itself, and down into the imagination. Ezekiel has a terrible picture of certain old men, much respected in the city, leading clean and unchallengeable lives, who, when the darkness fell, stole out into the night, and furtively slipped through the streets,

and up into the Temple, locking its doors behind them, and so to a hidden postern let secretly into a wall, and through it, locking it too with care, and in that room where none might follow, and where even God's eyes, they felt, did not see, its walls all covered over with loathsome pictures and obscenities of hateful, crawling, filthy things, they carried through unspeakable orgies to unthinkable gods, and so watchfully crept forth, and back through the now silent streets, and out into their irreproachable lives again and the respect of decent unsuspecting men and women. What do you dream about? asks Christ. What do you picture when you are alone? And holding up that searching light of His, He flashes it upon the walls of our imagination to show—what? Is it reptiles and crawling things and horrors hidden away? Are we as true and pure there in that secret place, with never an eye to see, as out in the broad light of staring day? Your conduct may be blameless and your words irreproachable, your very thoughts immaculate. But what of your imagination? Dare you face that test?

And yet so terrible is it to Christ that one should be besmirched by evil even there, that He plunges into that terrific metaphor, surely the most heart-shuddering thing in Scripture, about the right hand cut off and the right eye torn out, anything, everything to be saved from this foul, festering pollution! Once on a day I had a ghastly experience. The 'phone rang early in the morning, and an hysterical woman's voice bade me come instantly. I went, and found that a most brilliant student had suddenly gone crazy in the night, had with a safety-razor blade cut off his hand, and lay there laughing exultantly. "I did right," he cried, "I can look Jesus in the face." They took him to the hospital, his hand beside him in a paper bag, and from thence to the asylum, poor crazed soul! But as I stood there in that blood-splashed place, Christ's almost terror of sin, even in thought, came rushing in upon me. Pluck it out! Cut it off! Or it will fester, poison, slay your soul!

Lastly, this new righteousness is a positive and not simply a negative thing, is more by far than a mere painful avoidance of evil; it is a glorying in doing right, and that according to a marvellous standard. Stevenson once sent a letter to his mother which he headed "A Christmas Sermon," denouncing the gloom of his father's religion, and underlining this conception that Christianity is much more than a not-doing this, and a not-doing that. These negative commands, he wrote, have a "black angry look," and, indeed, till one has actual "pleasure in these difficult decisions," things are not well with us, and after all the whole of essential morality is "just kindness." Well, Christ agrees with that. What we have got to do, said He, is just to love. But when Stevenson imagined that that makes things greatly easier for us, in the deepest sense he is surely entirely wrong. Not easier, but harder—far, far harder. For look at what Christ means by loving. Take those tremendous sayings that have puzzled the world ever since they were uttered, and around which there is a constant din and never-settling dust of controversy, about non-resistance and the like. They look as if they outlawed war: they look as if they ruled out law: they look as if they opened the door of opportunity for every impudent and importunate scamp to fatten on his fellow's kindness and credulity. And what are we to do with them? Are they meant to be vivid metaphors, like that about the hand and eye? Or are they to be taken literally? Is the world, for example, waiting for a martyr nation, who will not resist when threatened by war, but go to its Cross, as Christ went to His, and so lift the world to better things? Perhaps I have a barbarous soul that has been left behind by the rising tide of understanding of what the faith means. Yet there are wars conceivable to which, should they spring upon us, I for one would have to go again; or else not be able to look Christ in the eyes. And I believe in law as a Divine appointment that has changed this world from an uneasy scene of tyranny

and insecurity into a safe and kindly place. And I will not give to some rogues whose life is a deliberate deception of better, aye, and sometimes poorer, people than themselves, and who by that are losing their own souls. But I will do my little part, as a voter and as a Christian, to prevent wars of aggression, and to seek to stamp these altogether from God's earth ; and I will pay my taxes uncomplainingly to help my less fortunate fellows, and try to be generous upon the Christian scale ; and I will seek to be easy to live with, and not quarrelsome even about my undoubted rights, but forbearing and large-minded and kind. But easy !

The truth is, says Christ, that what is wrong is that you are all using far too low a standard, with the result that you are much too quickly satisfied. It is not nearly enough to be just ; though even that, God knows, is hard to practise ; or to claim no more than your bare dues ; or to pay your fellows their full rights ; or to deal with men as they deserve. All that is far less than your bounden duty. When you use such things as your scale of measurement you are taking custom, or the conventions, or other people round about, or at the best the worthiest of them, as your index of how you ought to live and what you ought to be. And none of these will do. For your standard is God. For you to live deliberately on a lower moral plane than God is failure. And look yonder ! There is an open sinner ; yet you see the sunshine does not skip his fields ! And there a scandalously immoral man ; yet on his croft the rains fall just as healingly as upon any other. And you too in God's generous way must blot out enmity however well deserved as men judge things, and must forget ingratitude, and must meet rank unworthiness and worse with a queer stubborn love that keeps on obstinately loving in despite of everything. So only shall you prove yourselves the children of that Father who, whatever you have done, still unaccountably persists in loving you.

But who is sufficient for these things ? Like some barbarian looking into Plato, aye, far more confusedly, so do I

peer into the mind of Christ, as at a thing how far beyond and above me as yet. Only, you remember Bunyan, how the evangelist asked, "Do you see yonder wicket gate?" And the man answered, "No, I don't." "Well, do you see that shining light," he was next asked, and he replied, "I think I do." "Keep that light in your eye, and you will reach the goal in time," so he was told. Let us, too, keep our eyes on Christ and follow Him on to the end of all we see to be His will, as that will becomes ever fuller to us. And in us also it will all come true at last.

XI

HOW TO MAKE OUR SERVICES EFFECTIVE

MARK vi. 53–56

THERE are many who tell us these days with a noisy emphasis that the Church is an extraordinarily ineffective institution, an outworn absurdity that can quite safely be neglected in the living of our lives, and ignored altogether in our calculations of the things that really matter in the world.

Some raucous and perspiring spirits, of course, go much further, declaring angrily that, worse than being merely stupid, it is a positive nuisance and a main hindrance to progress, inasmuch as, through its thin, far-off hopes and insubstantial dreams and fairy stories of another life, it keeps doping people into tame and wicked acquiescence with things as they are, whereas they ought to be up on their feet, with a hot fury in their hearts, and breathing hard as they tug desperately to bring some semblance of order into this wild, topsy-turvy chaos of a world. Out of the way! they cry; and are quite cross about it.

But, even apart from these exasperated folk, many who would like to believe in the Church are not sure that they do, and look at it a little queerly. Here, they say, is an immense organization, with agencies flung wide as the earth itself. At any given moment there are thousands of men more or less hoarse from constant speaking. Always there are meetings upon meetings, endless meetings, which must mount up to millions in no

very spacious stretch of time, and a whole army of eager workers ever restlessly upon the move, like ants or bees, quite horribly industrious. And amid all this noise and babble the stolid earth spins unconcernedly upon its way. And nothing ever happens. Nor do these zealous folk seem to expect that anything will happen, nor indeed do they care For they have hypnotized themselves into imagining that their activities are an end in themselves. And so long as their meetings and methods and agencies keep spinning round and round, with a roaring of wheels, and a wind blowing breezily into their faces; so long as these busy engineers, in love with their machinery, can potter about it, and set it going, and make themselves hot and oily and delightfully messy and tired, they are apparently content.

Old Gaspar was in full-throated and entirely happy boastfulness over the great fight of his youth, when, as we all remember, that little voice broke in asking, "But what came of it all?" This was regarded as a stupid and impertinent irrelevancy, and was pushed hurriedly aside. Yet when the lad stuck to his point, the old man faltered somewhat, and confessed he did not know. Nor did he seem to care. All that mattered to him was that it was a glorious victory. So, when the Church flings down with pride its enormous statistics of its membership, its liberality, its mass of meetings, some awkward minds will ask with deplorable gaucherie, "Yes, but what do your meetings do?" Do! Why, they keep the Church in being! "And what does the Church do?" It holds the meetings, to be sure! "And what comes of the meetings?" They maintain the Church, you fool! "I see," says little Peterkin; but he is not convinced, being a pertinacious and somewhat stubborn child. Round and round, with no grist ever coming from the mill, and the miller wholly satisfied because his well-oiled wheels keep spinning merrily! That is a toy for childish minds, a futile and ridiculous fatuity!

That is, of course, by far too harsh a criticism, and a much too gloomy judgment. There is a great deal more in the Church than a mere contagious itch for speaking. Probably, indeed, there has never been more need for its services than now, when the world is so noisy and breathless and rushed. I don't believe that we are really busier than former days. The last survivors of the hand-loom weavers, at least, used to ridicule our claim to that, declaring that we are a generation of large leisure, lolling at our ease, compared to their own desperate and unremitting struggle to tug the ends of things together. But certainly life has become far fuller, much more varied, overcrowded with competing and insistent interests thrusting themselves upon us, greatly faster in its pace. Pascal once declared that nearly all the ills in life spring from this simple source, that we are not able to sit still in a room. That is bad news for us these breathless days, when we have all a stitch in our sides yet must run on and on. For our minds are so chased about, so chivied to and fro, so pulled this way and that by eager claimants for our flurried and bewildered attention that something has to be left out. And that something is desperately apt to be God. But happily the services come, like a little clearing in the choking jungle of our life from which we can catch sight of the wide heavens and the stars again ; where we can feel the winds of God playing upon our foreheads, and with that our hearts revive.

Alexander Smith, that busy editor, immersed in all the dust and flurry of a political crisis, was weary to his very soul. He was moving listlessly along a dull street in the thronged jostle of Glasgow when he chanced upon a flower dropped upon the hot pavement. And suddenly there came home to him what he had forgotten—that it was summer ! And, standing there, among the traffic and the crowds, he saw the rolling fields of endless gold, and the calm hills, throwing long shadows over the sun-soaked land, and the lush depths of the woods with the blue mists of the wild hyacinths on every bank, and the

ferns shrinking together into the mossy corners and his heart felt cooler even in the city's glare and din.

In Aberdeen we forget the sea, hardly remember it is there. For we are shut in by the crowding streets, are busied and hustled about other things. But sometimes to one lying wakeful in the stillness of the night, clean across the whole breadth of the city, there comes, what is quite lost amid the rumbling of the traffic through the day but now fills and haunts the silence, the crash of mighty breakers, and the boom and roar of the incoming tide, bringing into our cosy nook "murmurs and scents of the infinite sea," and some sense of the mystery, the gallantry, the adventure out there on the great waters! So at these times of hush and worship, into our flat, tame, inland lives rushes a great home-sickness, the call of the deep: "I must go down to the sea again." And with that our souls are up and off.

I know that, even in these days of lesser congregations, when we have, perhaps, the right to assume that the people who do come are likelier to be there, not merely from convention, but with some pressing purpose and some real spiritual desire, a service can still be a very formal thing, with folk sitting it decorously out, and putting through what they feel vaguely had better be done, but with no very definite expectation of much happening. And yet there are always those in deadly earnest—and sometimes most unlikely folk at that, to outward seeming. "What I need is a mother," growled Carlyle suddenly one day. Who would have thought that behind that brave, scarred face, that rugged personality, that almost over-independent character there was a heart that cried out for a little tenderness! And each time in the pews there are plain and unspiritual-looking people seeking for their Father, for some one to whom it matters how they fare, who will stretch out to them a steadying hand. And always, hidden away among these placid faces, there are souls hanging in the balances, fearsomely so! That is a dreadful tale of Stanley Jones,

that the man who is the brains of the Anti-Christian movement in China was once himself vastly impressed by Christianity, and one night, much moved, all but won, wistful and very near the Kingdom, turned in to a church to test things for himself; and, as it happened, heard a poor, dull, superficial sermon, and rose up in wrath, and flung the whole thing from him. The preacher, poor soul, was perhaps weary, or rushed that week, or out of form that evening. Yet that one failure of his has had such appalling consequences, has cost Jesus Christ how tragically much! And always there are those faced by some decision to be made, and who need something to push them into gallantry of action; or thinking out their lives, and a glimpse of Christ would fire their hearts; or sin-sick and ashamed, and some word of God could heal their souls, if only we could get in through to them. And if they do not find it now it may be too late ever afterward. The mood will pass, the tide will ebb, the opportunity will fade for ever. While irritated people, impatient to be gone, fidget and fuss, because the sermon is five minutes longer than is to their liking, that is what any preacher with some sense of his responsibility is remembering, that for some souls this is their only chance, that never again will there be just that situation in their mind, that Christ must win them now, if it is ever to be done. Put back your watch! For is it wonderful, so seeing, that he lingers and tries even once again.

> "Each soul I might have succoured, may have slain;
> All souls shall face me at the great assizes."

Ah, God! Ah, merciful God! See how reproachfully they look at me! Yet I did try! Did try! And yet, not as I might! Cover me with the wide robe of Thy pity! Oh, merciful God!

But, blessed be His name, it is not all failure. For Christ stands to His wonderful word with a loyal exactness;

and where two or three are gathered together in His name is, every time, most surely there. And folk rise up and go their ways less tired, more sure of God, with a new proof of His sufficiency for them. Yes, even if the human element be next door to unbearable. Don't you remember old George Herbert's quaint experience, that always when the sermon was just unendurable, God Himself came to him and said, "This frets you beyond bearing; and yet I am putting up with you." And so sent him home with his heart singing over God's bewildering patience, learned again through the medium of an intolerable service!

Still, who of us will question that there ought to be far more to show? There should be; there is meant to be; there can be. And how? How can we make our services more real and more effective? Does not this passage give us a full answer? For here things did happen; here for once Christ's power had its blessed way without restraint, here we read mysteries and glories with bewildered hearts. And yet, in a spiritual sense, at least, it should and might be happening each time we come together in His presence. How?

Immediately they recognized Him. You note that! That was the beginning, the source of it all. Many eyes, no doubt, were watching that boat making for their shore; and, when the little company disembarked, some one who had seen or heard or talked to the new Prophet, whose name was in everybody's mouth these days, started, and looked again! Yes! there was no mistake! "That's Jesus!" he said confidently. And when others scoffed, not without reason, for why should He come to their secluded corner far out of the tide of things, "But it is," he held to it, "I can't mistake Him, I heard Him once when I was over on the other side! That's He!" And some one else, it seems, corroborated him; and soon the news was buzzing everywhere, "Jesus is here!" and they were gathering in excited knots all looking the one way. And, "Yes! that's

Him," others kept saying, while excitement rose to fever heat. For what might not happen now that this unthinkable chance had blown into their lives! "Jesus is here! Jesus is here!" the cry rang everywhere; and from all quarters, throwing down whatever they were doing (that could wait), they came streaming to Christ.

Well, Jesus is here too. But do we recognize Him? When you set out to church is your heart skipping excitedly like a happy child, and singing to itself for very gladness, I am going to see Jesus Christ! I always do! He never fails me, but is always there! And to-day again He will lay His hand in healing on me, and will give me some great word, of blessed warning, it may be, or of astonishing hope; will surely pause beside me, and will say to me, "What wilt thou I should do for you?" If people really felt that, really met Christ, really recognized that He was here, would it be possible for them to stay away? And if they don't so see Christ, then must it not be, in great degree, the preacher's fault? It would never occur to me to rail at the people for not coming, but rather to put very searching and uncomfortable questions to my own stumbling soul. Dr. John Hutton declares that once, as he gave out his text, he saw a man settling himself comfortably for a snooze. "If," said he, "any one can fall asleep while I am preaching, he is fully entitled so to do; the blame is mine. But a friend here to-day is taking an unfair advantage of me. He is going to sleep before I get begun. No! no! we must start fair! That's all I ask!" That's how I feel about this matter of church attendance. If they can stay away—but how can they? Surely we preachers must have sadly muddled things! For we have, far and away, the most exciting and most glorious tale in the old world to tell, and it seems we have not fascinated and enthralled them with it, but so bored them that they can somehow keep from hearing it. Surely they can't have recognized that Christ is really here, the wonderful Christ, who can still help and heal and

save as marvellously as He ever did ; and they so needy, and so sin-sick, and so poor !

I know there is another side to it. Christ lost His crowd, was left at last all but alone. Let us remember that, and not judge spiritual things by vulgar and material standards, such as numbers and excitement and the like. No doubt, the preacher is a fool who argues hardily from the sparseness of his congregation to the Christlikeness of His message, yet not less indefensible is the hearer who sees in it a clear proof of the preacher's failure. For by that standard he would rule out Jesus too as palpably, upon his showing, a futility and a fiasco. He also, after the first gush of transient enthusiasm, was not popular, grew less and less so, every day, saw His crowds dwindle, and men tire of Him and turn away. Nor did He ever try to win them back. Did not the disciples, annoyed at seeing their hopes fade, and chances being lost, remonstrate with Him angrily, telling Him flatly that He knew nothing of human nature, that He was frightening them away by asking far too much as a beginning, that He must really modify His message—all the usual clever worldly wisdom !—that you must get the people before you can influence them, had better get them almost anyhow than not at all ; for having got them you can then begin to educate them to your level, and so on. But Christ stood firm. I will give them, He said, not what they want, but what they need. I will not have them on their terms, but only upon Mine. I will accept, not what they choose to fling to Me, but what I claim, and winnowed them like wheat, and sifted and resifted them, and looked after them sadly as they streamed away, but would not lower His standard to gain any one.

And yet, if we had made them feel that Christ is here, the wonderful Christ of the New Testament with that amazing power and helpfulness of His, surely not all of them could have stayed away or have worshipped so languidly ! And He is here. He promised it, and He stands to it, and every

time some happy souls prove it is really true. But we so hide Him from the most of them under a mist of words that do not help, by prayers that are not really praying, by poor superficial faded talk that does not open their eyes to see Him, nor make them thrill because He is quite near. There is a little country church in which the minister, on entering from the vestry, is confronted by the wistful challenge painted on the walls, "Sir, we would see Jesus." Aye! that is what we need. If only we recognized Him, knew that He is here, felt we are face to face with Him, what would yet happen every time, in place of these dull hours that drag themselves away through cold and formal rites to the expected barrenness of any real result. If! if! Aye, and why should we not? For He is here. The wonderful Christ is here, standing beside you now. And everything is possible.

But, further, you note this—that in this happy countryside where for once Christ's power really came into its own, it was largely because they could not keep Him to themselves, but had to share Him, had to do what in them lay to make sure everybody was participating in this glorious thing. Every one was helping to carry down to Him some poor maimed creature, too ill to manage for himself: everywhere they were consulting one another, so that no one might be overlooked. Is there any one else? Why, yes! That old body in her lonely cottage far out of the beaten tracks, she too must have her chance; and with that they had started off for her. Every one was opening doors for Christ, was devising further opportunities for Him, was bringing Him face to face with people who on their side had been stirred to expect great things from Him: and in that atmosphere these great things came. And that is what we also are supposed to be doing when we come to worship. And it is, largely, the absence of that spirit in us that so baffles Christ.

For, to begin, our own mood tells on others much more than we know: the communion of saints is a real thing: and

when even one stands on tiptoe waiting for Christ in a thrilling of expectancy, others are apt to gather and watch for Him too. And, further, we have our own definite part to play. For we come to a service, not to get only, but also to give.

For long, scientists could not understand how it is that even in the longest droughts of tropical lands, when all the green things are burned up and the watercourses dry and dusty, the ants managed to keep their huge heaps always moist with that wet steamy heat they love. And only lately was it discovered, in one heap carefully investigated, that they had sunk a cunningly constructed shaft no less than sixty-five feet long, down to a perennial spring that no drought ever touches, and that at night the whole busy little population was detailed to hurry down and up again time after time, bearing the precious water with which to keep alive their little fields of fungus crops and spread abroad that wetness which they need for health. "I," said Christ, "am the living water." And however hot and dry it be, here we can hear the sound of it still running cool and fresh and full. Sometimes of itself it gushes out, one knows not why, and in a moment the bleached riverbeds are foaming torrents with new life and greenness all along their banks, and spreading far out into the gaping dryness. But, as a rule, we must all do our part if these parched, arid, dusty lives of ours are to feel a reviving even from Christ.

Take, as an example, what is perhaps the very core of the whole service, the holiest of all, where we come fairly face to face with God,—the prayer of intercession. If we believe in prayer, and in this prayer, and in the Hearer and the Answerer of prayer, that act of ours is a tremendous thing. For we are cutting channels down which, somehow, the grace of God will rush with fuller flow into a needy world. And souls, the whole earth over, will be the better, the less tired, the gallanter, the nearer God because we prayed for them. Whoso believes that has a responsibility that terrifies laid on his soul. For him prayer is no mere vague listening, no

placid acquiescence, no dull, half-hearted thing. Rather, as M'Leod Campbell thought, that what Christ did upon the Cross was, gathering the ghastly mass of all the sin of the whole world into His single soul, to make confession of it all to God in one perfect unthinkable Amen to all His will concerning it whatever that cost Him, so really to pray is —so to speak—to take into one's little heart the whole of this world's pain and sorrow till the thing becomes an agony dimly resembling Christ's Gethsemane. It must grow vivid to us till we see it, that's why our imagination has been given us : and real and dreadful, till we feel it stabbing us like a personal sorrow. Pray, urges Paul, for those in prison as if you yourself were there ; as if the fetters were upon your wrists, and your heart sick, as theirs are, at the dull, hopeless monotony and sheer despair of it day after day. We make petition for those who are dying, and so doing we ought to be feeling something of what it must be to have the cold sweat gathering upon our forehead, to see the loved familiar things fading away, to know that life is over, and our chance come to an end, and God's judgment-seat no far-off possibility, but there ! Or, we pray for the tempted ; and our hearts should see some lassie all but giving way, and as if it were our own lassie, should leap up and clutch at God, crying, Not that ! dear God, not that ! And so all through the prayer.

Ruskin once scoffed at us in a very superior way, because we call these gatherings of ours " our services." They come to meet their Father, to receive of His infinite kindness ; and they have the effrontery, he says, to call that serving Him ! It was a stupid sneer, because we come to give as well as get. And prayer to be called prayer is a huge gift, a desperately tiring thing that leaves one if not halting on one's thigh, like Jacob after his tremendous prayer, with virtue gone out of us. No less than that is what we have been supposed to be doing all these years each time we come to worship ! And in reality we have been turning in half-heartedly, and putting things

through mechanically, and so going our unexpectant way, even presuming to blame God because so little has come of it! And we ourselves have never once fulfilled the conditions plainly set down for us as those which alone create the atmosphere in which the promises normally can come true, and the big things get done. It is you and I who have been thwarting Christ!

> "Each soul I might have succoured, may have slain,
> All souls shall face me at the great assizes!"

At you, too, they are looking with reproachful eyes. What are we doing hanging about aimlessly in Jesus' presence? Diligently we ought to be carrying to Him in our thoughts and prayers those who have need of Him. And if we did so, now, as in this instance long ago, it would all certainly come true.

But the best way to help others to Christ is to make proof of Him for ourselves where we have need of healing. That is what happened here. It was because people they knew were being cured that others felt they might be too, and so daringly brought the most impossible cases, hopeless on the face of them, and with which every one had known for years that nothing could be done; and yet they, too, found health. And every added instance lit a hope, in other minds met their last doubt, and set them also running to Christ with their own needs and wants, quite sure now He would somehow manage even for them. He healed every one, so we read. Every one! That is Christ's daring way, to fling down an unlimited promise before this desperate world, a confident assertion that, let anybody's need be what it may, He can meet that, and will—a fearless challenge to the very worst. To the most broken soul here, hanging back listlessly and unimpressed, quite sure that anything that even Christ can do can make no difference for him, that his plight at least is beyond Him, must be so, that in his case things can't be remedied, are long past that, to him Christ pushes

His eager way and says, "Let Me see it, this that is to baffle Me; let Me hear the worst you have to tell! Because I guarantee that it too I can master for you, and that you too I can heal."

And yet although we know that He so promises, we are not acting on it, don't believe it, dully accept our habits as inevitable, Christ or no Christ; and our present personality as no doubt disappointing and disturbing but beyond radical change, live in an earth that has cooled into a set and stable place, quite unlike Paul's with its tremendous sudden earthquakes changing a whole landscape in a night, and mighty rushing winds of God abroad, sweeping away what seemed immovable, till it has vanished like a dream.

A man once said to Denney that what struck him in the Church to-day is the number of "hopeless ministers," men tired and unexpectant, doggedly putting through their duty because it is duty, but without thought of any large results. And there must be hopeless people in the pews as well, or they could not frequent Christ's presence, and so little come of it. At which you stir impatiently, growling, "I know that that is what is said in churches, what one is supposed to believe; only, of course, it isn't true; such things don't really happen." But they do: aye, and they might for you. Nothing good is impossible in the same world as Christ. "Impossible!" scoffs Carlyle. "Impossible! Of a certain two-legged animal with feathers it is said, if you draw a distinct chalk circle round him, he sits imprisoned, as if girt with the iron ring of Fate; and will die there, though within sight of victuals—or sit in sick misery there, and be fatted to death. The name of this poor two-legged animal is—Goose." Not always! You, too, are guilty of a poltroonery that is not only ghastly, but ridiculous. Your prison doors are open, your fetters are worn through, in Christ you could snap them to-day, if you would only take that in, and believe it, and try, and step across the chalk

line into liberty! There is sound sense, if little poetry, in Blake's queer doggerel:

> "Don't doubt, and don't believe, without experiment!
> Why, that's the very thing that Jesus meant
> When He said, 'Only believe,' believe and try!
> Try! try! and never mind the reason why."

Aye, if we only tried, it would mean a new glory for ourselves, and infinite helpfulness through us to others. Bayle was no Christian in our sense, yet he declared that Pascal's character was an unanswerable argument for that; and that such a man living his daily life did far more for his faith than half a dozen eager missionaries could effect with all their speaking. That maniac whom He healed was all the evidence Christ needed in Decapolis. Be sure that, with that living witness there before their eyes, there were no doubts nor questionings in that village! For them the thing was settled. And if we also took Christ at His word, and dared to venture on Him, and put Him to the test where we have need of Him; and if His power really did fall upon us, and the thing worked out, seeing our temper healed, our selfishness expelled, our earthiness of nature transmuted into chivalry and Christlikeness, those round about us, too, would be convinced, would pluck up heart, would bring their need in turn to One who they have seen with their own eyes can heal, can help, can save.

And that is the high office that Christ offers each of us! He pauses beside you, and says, laying His hand upon your uncouth hearts and shabby ways, "I am willing to take this as a test case! If in this life here I cannot make good all I have ever promised, then I admit I am not trustworthy." And then He turns, and looks at you, and smiles, and adds, "But then I know I can, if you will let Me."

Well, do you?

XII

CHRIST'S PROMISE TO THE TIRED

"Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."—MATT. xi. 28–30.

ALWAYS there are those who are irritated by being met by a subject such as this. "Now that," they grumble hotly, "is a typical instance of the kind of thing that makes us feel away from home in religion, and that it has nothing whatever to say to us." For, you see, these confident critics are young as yet and well and happy. They find life very good and excitingly interesting, and growing better every day. And accordingly when they come to church it is to praise God with full-throated thanksgiving; and this minor music does not fit their mood at all nor seem to them to touch reality. "Burdens," they say, "what burdens?" And indeed so far they are happily carefree and light of foot. "Rest!" they cry, handling Christ's offered gift with open disrelish. "And who wants rest? Our difficulty is that the days flashing past aren't nearly long enough for all the splendid things that we want to crowd into them, so that masses of these have perforce to be left undone. We can't live fast enough to live all that we want to live, and huge arrears keep heaping themselves up, do what we can and bustle how we may. In this bewilderingly fascinating world, so full of tempting and competing interests, it isn't rest we want; rather the power to be a dozen glorious things at once. For, as it is, picking and choosing as we have to do, we miss so infinitely much, can use only a tithe of what this prodigal life keeps throwing at us with both hands." Well,

no doubt God is happy in His children's happiness. And yet for these blithe spirits also there is something very vital here, as we shall see.

But, to begin with, let them look round on any chance company of their fellow men and women, and surely even they must see how tired the eyes of many of them are, how drenched in weariness is their whole being, with bodies that are almost at the limit of their strength (for this fierce rush of competition is a cruel thing, and many must keep running somehow though their breath comes short and pantingly), with minds dulled by fatigue, for always they are tugging desperately to make the too short ends of things just meet; yes, with their very souls at their wits' end, for life is dark and difficult to understand, and their peering eyes are strained and sore with trying to make out the meaning of it all in the dim light they have. And they look up at the long, hot, straight, dusty road of duty stretching out endlessly before them, day on day, and how can it be done? they ask themselves, and there is terror in the question. For indeed their feet are very heavy even now, and their lagging steps have lost all spring, and there is still so very far to go. And what they need, poor souls, is some reviving and refreshing that will give them heart to rise and face what, as things are, they feel just can't be done, a comfortable sense that they are not alone, not left to stagger on until they drop; but that there is Some One to whom it matters how they fare, Some One quite near and who will help them through.

And here is Jesus' promise of precisely what they want, an invitation to all tired and dusty things as open as that of the London churches. "Enter, rest, pray!" And whoso does so passes at a step out of the glare and heat and jostle of the hard, crowded, lonely streets into a dimness and a coolness and a hush that soothes and heals and sinks into the very soul, till in a little he can rise and go his way, by far less tired. And now that

we are shut in here with Christ that is what ought to happen to us too. This service of ours should be like a window opened in a stuffy factory through which a breath of coolness should blow in on our hot souls. It ought to send us on our way no longer dog tired, but with what Stevenson called "happy morning faces," prepared to heave up again our burdens to our fretted shoulders, saying cheerfully, "Well, here is my duty waiting me; and here am I, thank God, ready and fit for it, and well able to put it through!" It is over a very weary world that there rings out this confident assurance that has no exceptions, but includes your difficulty too. "Come to Me, talk it out with Me, allow Me to share with you that which you can't bear by yourself, and I promise you I will manage for you, and will bring you bravely on your way; yes, even that; yes, even there!"

Wasn't that worth your while coming to hear? And mark you, it is really true. And, oh, the folly of it if you let it lie unclaimed, and cheat yourself out of what would make that irksome life of yours another thing!

Such is Christ's guarantee. And then without a pause, bewilderingly enough, He passes to a metaphor which seems quite queerly inapposite, as if for once His cunning hands had lost their instinctive skill. Every one knows Watt's picture of Hope, that seated figure that to many eyes looks much more like despair, with its bowed head and bandaged eyes and lute with every string snapped through save one. But Christ's picture of Rest is still more puzzlingly unfamiliar. You have watched a man ploughing, with the clean, fresh earth upturning, and the white gulls circling screamingly about him or darting to settle for a moment with poised wings almost at his very feet, and so away again, and he himself with steady eyes fixed on the goal, and arms, all taut muscle standing out like whipcord, gripping the shafts, and the patient horses, with their beautiful, glossy skins shiny with perspiration, straining and heaving as the share slowly rips the stubborn soil—and all this up and

down, and down and up, unendingly the whole long, tiring day. Translate all that into the local colour of the East, the glare of the pitiless sun, the dust-storms blowing past, the merciless heat, the steaming creatures pulling, pulling—up and down, and down and up—it is a perfect picture not of rest surely, but of toil. And that is what Christ offers! "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you." Up and down, and down and up, tugging unendingly. Well, to me there is infinite hope in that, clear proof that our Lord realizes your true situation. And that surely is good news.

That is a dreary picture Matthew Arnold gives us of the ordinary man chained to his dull monotony of routine, hot and tired and apathetic.

> "With heads bent o'er their toil, they languidly
> Their lives to some unmeaning taskwork give,
> Dreaming of naught beyond their prison wall.
> And as, year after year,
> Fresh products of their barren labours fall
> From their tired hands, and rest
> Never yet comes more nigh,
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Death in their prison reaches them,
> Unfreed, having seen nothing, still unblest."

Yet, hearing it, how many hearts cry, "That's my case! I have no life to call a life, am but a wheel swept round and round one limited circle every day and all the day. My personality is wasted upon trivialities, my being thrown away on little nothings that can't matter: in the stale atmosphere where I must live my soul can't breathe, and God goes out." And they batter upon the bars of fate that hem them in, crying how desperately, "Let me out." But, says Christ, to be spiritually minded, to have poise and balance of soul one does not need to shrink out of the jostle and press of life into some sheltered nook. Up and down, and down and up, in the pitiless sun; and even there one can keep cool in soul! Remember His brave prayer for us, that surely makes the

blood leap to our faces in sheer pride at His daring confidence in us. "I pray not Thou shouldest take them out of the world." There is no need for that. For there at the hot heart of it they can and will carry themselves with honour —I know it—can serve God, can grow in Christlikeness, can remain restful and big-hearted, and by their steadiness shame others out of peevishness and snivelling. Though you are set down at a task that seems by far too hard for you, that leaves, you feel, no atom of room for the big things in your rushed mind, that absorbs all your energy and all your time and your whole life, and asks for more there, says Christ, I can give you rest.

Listen to the popular dreams of the generation, and you will hear that many people have made up their minds that nothing can be accomplished with the world as we know it, that to bring in any real improvement the whole order of things about us must be shattered and rebuilt upon a wiser plan, that our entire environment must thoroughly and radically be changed. And not a few among us answer not unnaturally that, whether that be so or not, they at least can't hope to see it, but must live their lives in the world as it is. And can nothing at all be done for me? they ask. You have brave hopes for posterity, and bright dreams for the coming days, but me, so rushed and tired and overdriven, do you push aside, and tell me bluntly that it is my misfortune to have been born too soon into a half-barbaric world, still only in the making, and that I must pay the penalty of that? What is the use of talking about shorter hours to me, a trachled woman, who must pack into my bulging days far more than they are made to hold, aye, and be roused up in the night by wailing little voices? No doubt, in some millennium far ahead, things may be ordered as you say, but meantime in the darkness round me fearsome things are crouched ready to spring, and shudderingly I can hear them creeping nearer and yet nearer. In some dim, far-off day the race may reach your lovely land of streams

and shade and fruit trees, but must I stumble on as best I may, in this fierce glare and ankle deep in sand, till I fall out? Has no one anything to offer me? "I have," says Christ. "I can give rest of soul, not only in some sheltered corner out of the sun, but in that perspiring, jostling, dusty, irritated press where you must shove your way."

And I for one believe Him. Remember that it was in no fair garden, but on the bleak, wind-swept slopes of Calvary He found that heartsease that the world has carried in its bosom ever since, that it was facing the horrors of the cross that He offered to share a peace that nothing else can give and nothing wrench away! And it is just to you who need it most, you set down in the rush and the monotony of things, you hot and tired and desperate, that He brings rest of heart and coolness of soul, and an unflustered sufficiency for all that is required of you. I promise it, He says, I promise it to you.

But how? you ask, half petulantly, feeling that you are surely being fooled by words that must be merely loose metaphors, meaning greatly less than they appear to do, and yet half eagerly, because it might be really true.

Well, first of all, says Christ, you are trying to do too much by yourself by far. Did you ever see one horse ploughing alone? It is a melancholy spectacle. And it is just as hopeless for you to live life in your own strength. There should be two under a yoke. And there will be, if you let it. For I will come in, and share with you, and add My strength to yours, and pull along with you. If there is any helpfulness in Me, and any grace, and any power, you can rely on them as yours, and draw on them up to the last limit of everything I have, and everything I am, and all that I can do. Your task will be My task, and I shall see it through. "God," says Paul, "has called us to be partners with His Son Jesus Christ." Think that out! Imagine a lad of great ideas but no capital suddenly made a partner in some leading firm, with all its resources behind him, his to

draw upon. Well, it's like that, says Paul; and of a sudden to us, so cramped and straitened and baffled, everything has grown possible.

Is that a promise that has any meaning in your life? Or is it just words, that tinkle pleasantly but emptily? There are innumerable men and women in the world to-day for whom its daily and literal fulfilment is the most sober and definite and unchallengeable of facts. Day in, day out, they do veritably draw upon a strength that is not their strength, and yet it is there. There is a presence that uplifts them, a comradeship that heartens them, a voice that rouses them, a hand that steadies them. And they can't fail to recognize it, because it is pierced. To them Christ is no figure of the long ago. He is a friend whom they meet every day, on whom they count, and with good reason. For never once has He failed them, and they know He never will. And so to them the doubts and fears of others are mere idle chatter without meaning. Mr. Le Gallienne tells us he once heard a rumour that Christ was not really alive and could not be; but the thing neither worried nor perturbed him, nor so much as interested him. For he had just parted with Christ, and knew that he would see Him again any moment.

> "So in the streets I hear them say,
> Yet Christ walks with me every day."

And don't you see the difference that that must make? If you had lived in Palestine long ago you would have taken your trouble to Him, and in His generous way He would have met it and healed you. And He is just as eager to help now. "Here," He says, "is a poor soul, over-driven, frightened, far too tired;" and His whole heart runs out to you. "Let Me come in and take that burden of yours on My shoulder! Let Me pull along with you! By yourself it is far too hard for you. But you and I together, we could manage it easily!" Aye, you could. For think of it! If all Christ's strength were added to your weakness, all His efficiency to your own

poor inadequacy, all His grace flung in to the aid of your slow, foolish, blundering heart, what could you not do, given that ? And it is given you freely !

Further, says Christ, I shall teach you My own character, and share with you My own courage of soul. "Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me. For I am meek and lowly in heart." Hearing which, some start back apprehensively. For, indeed, meekness is not a popular virtue. Nietzsche, and Machiavelli long before him, have scoffed snarlingly at such effeminacy, bidding us have manhood enough to abstain from this puling weakliness, to stand up on our own feet, stoutly to wrestle our way through, taking a blow from nobody without a fierce return, hitting with all our strength. And men's hearts are upon their side. And yet you and I are not meek simply because it is too brave and bold a thing for us even to try. We daren't be meek. In any case the plain fact is, the gallantest figure in human history is that of Jesus Christ, with His defiance of evil, His scorn of risk, His sheer contempt for all unworthy compromises, His marvellous big-heartedness toward life. Yes, and most gallant of all, His quiet acceptance of God's ordering of things, serenely giving thanks where others would have railed and blustered and blasphemed. Compared to His magnificence of spirit even the greatest of the rest of us look, and are, dwarfed and petty cowards. He went to the Cross by a steep, lonely way of failure, disappointment, heartache. Yet He has no whine against life but gives thanks for it gratefully, faces the worst of it without a whimper, asking only for a stout heart that will see it through with fullness of honour, and let God's plans work out through Him, whatever the cost be. And as we watch Him, if our hearts leap up in admiration, surely our faces flush with shame. For when things, even little things, won't turn our way, how apt we are to bleat and snivel and be sorry for ourselves, and break under the strain, and cry out against God, protesting aggrievedly that He is not taking us seriously—us, so

immensely important—that He is actually hurting us, and that it just won't do! Come to Me, says Christ, and I shall teach you how to face life in its difficult places with a valiant, a serene, a sunny heart. That is a great offer which we shall be fools not to accept. For we won't have gone far, you and I, before God's will clashes with ours, and our wishes are shattered, and some dear thing is taken from us. And if we are still seeking to manage for ourselves, once again we will be too apt to be mere querulous and peevish cry-babies.

And yet that need not be. You have seen a young creature led out to be harnessed for the first time—how timid it is, how wild of eye, how it shudders and shivers, with the sweat breaking out over its quivering body, how it rears and plunges, maddened by the touch of the unaccustomed rein, tossing its head continually to free its sensitive mouth from the intolerable fretting of the bit. And they yoke it in beside an old and wise and experienced companion, which at first does all the pulling, and by its presence there beside it steadies and soothes the frightened thing, and gives it confidence and courage, and teaches it the way of things, till it is quieted and unafraid and ready for its task. Live beside Me, says Christ, and I shall teach you to be brave, uncomplaining, cheerful, stout of heart. That's what we need. For life is a grave business, and is sure to test and try us drastically before all is over. And yet it can be done. You remember Stevenson's gallant assertion to a critic, scoffing at his too happy reading of the possibilities, that for him what he had said was not mere theory but actual experience, that he believed, had so far proved, was absolutely sure, that no one in any conceivable circumstances need break down in courage or in spirits or in faith; no, cried he, recklessly throwing down a tremendous challenge, not even in the most horrible and hopeless pain. It can be done. Live beside Christ, and it will be done, and that in you. Look at the Testament. I knew a man out at the front, a quiet,

unassuming soul who rarely spoke, and went home without any medals. Yet dozens of boys have told me that beside him, so cool and imperturbable and brave, they couldn't be afraid; that the infection of his courage blew across to them, and made them bigger men than they were in themselves. And that is what these people tell us in the Testament. We are poor things enough, so they acknowledge frankly. But beside Christ it is all different; and things grow possible—yes, and get done—that we could never have managed by curselves. One can't be selfish upon Calvary; one can't live meanly face to face with this example; one can't be churlish and mean-spirited and small with such a lead! And all Christ did for them He offers you. Come to Me, so He pleads, live with Me, let My influence play upon you day by day, and I will make a man of you, a strong soul out of that fidgety, frightened, timid thing you are to-day. I promise it, He says, and He is looking straight at you.

And if that metaphor of the yoke alarms you, if you hold back, crying that you don't want any yoke and won't submit to one, that you mean to be free and untrammelled and your own master, to use your life for your own ends in your own way according to your own desires, Christ at once reassures you. "My yoke is easy," He says; "My burden is light." Indeed, only beneath it will you, or any one, find real rest for your soul, a life that satisfies, an interest that meets the hunger of the heart. You want to be happy, He says. You are right. That is God's wish for you. But you are seeking happiness in impossible places where it never grows, by ways that never lead to it, but only to grey sea-water, brackish and salt, that leaves one thirstier than ever; only to what cheats and fools and for a time seems enough and very splendid, and then, like Dead Sea fruit it crumbles into nothingness and a poor handful of mere ashes. Run these roads how you will, you can reach only ennui and boredom in the end, nothing that permanently satisfies.

For happiness is a shy thing. Pursue it, and it will hide and elude you ; forget about it, give yourself to your fellows, and it will come to you gladly and eagerly and of itself. That is the law of life, says Christ, and the make-up of things that can't be altered. Come under My yoke, take a share of My huge burden of saving the world, play your part in My glorious adventure, give yourself for others, let the aim of your life be not your own comfort, or your own reputation, or your own anything at all, but that because you have lived in it, the world, please God, is going to be a better and a happier place ; pull with Me at My enormous task of lifting it out of the mud up to God's feet, and your heart will be happy with a happiness no one else knows, or can know.

And there is plenty proof of that. Who are the happiest people that you meet ? The man who thinks of no one but himself, and whose narrow horizons are bounded by his own selfish interests ? Certainly not. But mothers living for their children—listen how they sing about the house. And men spending themselves for some great cause ; and youths and maidens so full of the other that they have never a thought to spare for self. And, above all, those to whom to live is Christ. Believe Me, so He says Himself, till you set your life to the tune " Calvary," it can have no lilt in it, must be a dull and prosy thing that will not sing. The Lord God fashioned us for mighty ends, and nothing less than following that for which He made us can heal our restlessness of heart. He called us, says Paul, He called you and me " to be partners with His Son Jesus Christ " in His amazing enterprise. And, made for that, do you imagine we can be content with pottering at these shabby little nothings with which people seek to fill their days ? For a time it may seem to satisfy, but not for long. No, not the cleanest and most beautiful that this life has to offer. Did not even Ruskin cry out in a sobbing anguish, " Oh, why did no one tell me that the colours would fade, and that

the glory of the earth would vanish ; and that the soul asks and must have something bigger and better and more splendid than this earth can give it ? " You may be long in realizing that. But if so, one day you must stand with life all spent, and all for which you paid it faded and gone out, and you, poor dupe, left empty-handed, hungry-hearted, fooled ! Why should we hesitate to close with Christ ? It is so glorious a chance He offers us.

> " Our life is but a little holding lent
> To do a mighty labour : we are one
> With heaven and the stars when it is spent
> To serve God's aim : else die we with the sun."

Why should we choose to be ephemerids, we who might be immortals, God's fellow-labourers, Christ's yoke-fellows, leaving our mark on the eternities and on immortal souls ? It is the happiest of lives He gives, not cramped nor strained nor tortured nor misshapen, as men think, but full and free and very glorious. " Benevolence is not simple self-sacrifice," says Leslie Stephen, " except to the selfish : it is the pursuit of a noble and most interesting career." Of course it is. It is a fascination that enthrals, and to which nothing else can be compared. It is a splendour now, and the one possible preparation for still richer things beyond. " My idea of heaven," said Tennyson, " is the perpetual ministry of one soul to another," and we must learn the art of that—aye, and can do so—here, and be almost in heaven now. And are you going to fling all that away—for what ? Like Saul hiding among the stuff, offered a kingdom and preferring the tame duties of a croft, asking only to be allowed to spend his days on to the very end, scuttering to and fro in his poor byres, and splashing through his smelly muckheaps !

By the great ends for which God made you, by His huge and most honouring trust in you, by the remorse that you must one day know if you fling from you all these glories that are meant for you, are yours if you will have them, I beseech you think again, choose again, be sane. For

given this opportunity, what can one do but close with it with all one's soul? Surely you are not turning on your heel? You are not going away? You would not dream of bartering all this for that poor nothing to which your eyes keep straying? Listen! man, listen! Have you taken it in? This thing is offered you! You sitting there can live with Christ and like Christ, and for Christ, your Christ, God's wonderful gift to you!

XIII

WHAT CHRIST HATES MOST

"I hate men who are half and half."—Ps. cxix. 113 (Moffatt).

BROWNING vastly shocked many religious people by arguing at length that, if you have not got the stuff in you to dare to be good, then better be a frank and open sinner than a mere colourless nonentity, drifting, hesitating, shilly-shallying between the two, and never really anything at all. That sounds right dangerous teaching! And indeed it is most dangerous, if it be abused. And yet it is entirely scriptural. For if people would only read it, they would discover that the Bible—which they assume to be a placid kind of book, even a little dull, at least too drowsy to be interesting to live modern people, the very thing for a hot Sunday afternoon when folk quickly take to nodding over their listless reading—is in reality a bomb quite frightfully dangerous, to be handled with extreme care if it is not to burst with devastating consequences among our smug and humdrum views, our tame and prosy ways. Here, for example, is a man who has lived long, and had ample experience of men and things; and with a kind of fierce emphasis he sets it down that, whatever allowances may have to be made for our frail and blundering human nature, there is one type of person whom he cannot, and he will not, stand—the flabby, feckless creature who has no enthusiasms, who lives in no particular direction, and tells neither for nor against anything at all, but drifts aimlessly with the tides, back and fore, and fore and back again; agrees with the last

man he meets until he rubs up against some one with a contrary opinion, and then he feels there is much to be said for that view-point too ; is with you, yet never so wholeheartedly but that he leaves a back door of escape ; and, if a pinch comes, is not there. " I hate men who are half and half." Give me a loyal friend ; but, if that cannot be, then a declared and open enemy. Like a haunting phrase in some intricate piece of music to which it keeps recurring over and over, so does that note swell out persistently in Scripture, look almost where you will. For the grossest sinner it has pity ; for the clumsiest fumbler it has hope ; even for Judas it has a strange almost eerie self-restrained and determined silence ; but for a nameless thing that is nothing at all it feels only a horrible sick nausea and an instinctive shuddering of soul it cannot master. And this not only in its more uncouth places, like that wild pæan of triumph that checks itself in mid-career to hurl its biting gibes at Reuben who had boasted with the foremost in the future tense, yet, when the day came, found it inconvenient to be there ! It was most awkward and unfortunate, so he explained. But, of all possible dates, the clash had come upon his annual sheep-shearing, when he just could not be from home ! And so, busied and hot about his homely tasks, he glanced down now and then from his safe eyrie at that wild scuffle in the plain below, where freedom, his freedom, was being desperately lost or won ; and he with never a hand in it ! And Scripture looks at him a moment, and then quickly turns away, and keeps its eyes averted, as from an ugly and insulting libel on humanity.

Or like that strangest bit of Holy Writ, the prophet Obadiah, that wild war pamphlet spat out when hearts were still aflame with hate, and maddened by the unbearable soreness of defeat, a thing as hot and blistering as a sudden lava rush scorching its way through the green fields, a mere shudder of loathing, a shout of passionate detestation meant to wound, a furious flinging out of

a clenched fist denouncing doom, and little more. For Israel had fallen, its towns were blackened heaps ; and as the exiled captives look at their smashed life, what stings them to the quick is not even that in their old homes, theirs no longer, aliens are lolling at their ease ; that heathen dogs are polluting the holy places ; that Jehovah is forgotten in His own land ; that the brave dream of their fathers, whose flame had burned so steadily even in the wildest winds, was at last out and black and cold. Not even that ! What surges through their hearts and chokes them is that their kinsmen, the Edomites, safe in their own inaccessible fastnesses yonder where the red cliffs leap up sheer out of the plain, and the ravines are few and narrow and easily held, had watched with callous indifference and a cool unconcern while they themselves had fought for their life in great and rushing waters, and had lost it. These others had done nothing. They had stood aside ! They had acted on the assumption it was no affair of theirs ! They had done nothing ! In a desperate world, with a civilization going down before their eyes, with a friendly nation being savagely blotted out ! And they did nothing ! And at thought of that, the man's voice rising almost to a scream, his fury rolls and crackles and crashes like some reverberating thunderstorm caught and repeated and flung back again in long growling echoes that won't die away, but keep still volleying forth once more with renewed energy among the scarred and sullen Moabite mountains.

But what concerns us vastly more is that through all the clamour there rings out another and authoritative voice—grave, calm, deliberate, measured—passing the same horrified judgment on the same type of life.

Towards whom are the most terrible words in Scripture used ? And whom is Christ pictured as ranking absolutely last ? Not even the insincere, although His own frank eyes could blaze at thought of them and their pitiful make-believes, and the cheap shams with which they had deceived

themselves, and hoped to cheat their way through life, and hoodwink even God. Not even them. But quite respectable people, as we judge, against whom nobody can point a finger, keen in business (and why not ?), with shrewd eyes for a chance of furthering their own interests, not unattracted by the good things of this life, yet, on the other hand, as certainly not unimpressed by religion, and not indifferent to it. They have a pew in some church—and if it is not too fine, or again not too wet, they will be there. They live comfortably ; but they are quite safe for a subscription for any genuine cause. They mean to have a good time—that comes first, and is the essential in the planning of their lives—and they must, of course, lay past enough to ensure a continuance of that, even if, by and by, they should wish to draw out of things ; but, their own wants met, they are quite willing to give the small change lying about their pockets to Jesus Christ. No one can say they are against Him. It would be just not true. But, on the other hand, they are not hot for Him, not absorbed in His cause, not enthusiastic to help Him, not almost one-ideaed about this thing as many people are about football or art or business, or whatever makes life for them. Always when they speak of Him it is with grave respect ; often they do a little for Him ; but nothing that spells sacrifice, that pushes themselves out of the centre of their lives, that upsets their own comforts, that means giving up anything they really wish. They are mildly Christian, but not very much. And it is these immaculate people, living in the pleasant suburbs of the City of God, not too far in, of course—that would be dusty and noisy—and yet not quite outside it, that fill our Lord almost with sheer despair, and worse even than that, with what He says He can only describe as an ungovernable physical repugnance. They make me sick, He says bluntly. " I hate men who are half and half," cries this passionate soul. And so do I, says Jesus Christ. If they were openly hostile I could follow them about, could plead with them,

could argue and implore, could keep persistently breaking in upon them, and perhaps might convince and win them. But this pulpiness of theirs makes no resistance—gives Me nothing with which to strive; this lazy acquiescence in theory with all I say, though little that is practical follows; this insolent assumption that I am bargaining in the recognized Oriental way—have begun by stating impossible terms, and can, of course, be haggled and beaten down to something much more reasonable; this polite offering of a trifle, evidently without a doubt I will accept it and be very grateful for it—to Me who claim a man's whole life and soul and being, all that he has, all that he is, all that in time or in eternity he can become. If you can't give Me love and enthusiasm and the passion of your heart, I would that you were cold to Me! For then surely you would not deceive yourself, as you are doing now, into assuming confidently you are Mine when you are not; might be induced really to do what, as things are, you take for granted quite erroneously you are doing. "I hate men who are half and half." "So then because thou art lukewarm, behold, I will spue thee out of My mouth."

Am I alone in feeling a little shiver passing through my soul? For is not what our Lord denounces as entirely inadequate uncomfortably like what most of us are offering Him, and so going complacently upon our ways with absolutely easy minds, forgetful that He warns us that at the end some, almost amused at the ridiculous mistake by which they have been challenged, will turn to Him with confidence to put things right; and He, looking at them gravely, will make answer that they did listen to Him but did not follow far. They did agree in theory, but what came of it in practice? They did divert a runnel of their lives to Him, but the main current of it swept roaring past to turn the wheels of their own busy interests and unresting desires. It was seeking for some one upon whom I could depend I looked to you: and you, if not against Me, were not for Me much. I asked for

gallantry, whole-heartedness, enthusiasm, and you offered Me a tepid, cautious, non-committal thing of little use even in My skilled hands. There was not courage enough in you for what I mean by discipleship. You have deceived yourselves. You are not Mine. Could we protest as at an unfair judgment if He should say that to you and me ?

For, to begin with, is it not a hesitating and half-hearted credence we give Christ, that makes large reservations, and that, shrinking back, parts company with Him at once whenever He is violently in opposition to the world's conventional ways ? Is not what is wrong with us just this, that even yet we have not accepted many of Christ's axioms, either because His immense originality still staggers our slow minds, or because we dare not ; that certain of the principles on which He built life we push quietly aside, drop them unostentatiously out of sight as better buried, for, on the face of them, we feel they are out of the question and impracticable—very beautiful, no doubt, but not liveable out in the real world ? We have no wish for any open and ugly breach with Christ ; and we are sure there need be none : that He will meet us in a reasonable spirit, and that we can patch up a working compromise with Him. This we will do. But this is, of course, poetry or parable, or (that last clever refuge, which has much real truth in it, although we gravely overpress it) no longer literally possible in an age immensely different from Christ's—and after all it is a spirit that is given to us, for us to apply, and not a detailed code of rules to follow with slavish exactness. This, we are apt to say, whenever what Christ asks for doesn't suit us, and would cost, is obviously not meant to be taken very seriously, but just in a vague way to colour the background of one's thoughts. No ? Ah, then we don't like it, and won't have it, and are not going to do it ; and quietly we tear it up, and live our lives upon quite other lines. " Considering the number of them," said Leigh Hunt, " the paucity of Christians is amazing ! "

To take an instance that stares at us—our Lord's teaching about money! How we are meant to understand and to apply that may legitimately enough divide us. But this, at least, is abundantly plain, that He was surer of few things than of this, that to be comfortable in material things is quite desperately dangerous for the soul. Did He not say that over and over in the most arresting words? Did He not warn us time and again that, in His experience, what makes men throw away their lives and miss their chance is not, as a rule, open sin, but far oftener simply the fact that they are getting on, or because they want some of the good things of this life, and in their pursuit of these have no time left for God, forget about Him, drop Him out? "You can't both serve God and give your life to getting rich and living for the world," He said: "it can't be done." Either the one or other must be sacrificed. And does anybody really think that this about us is an honest effort even to try to accept that, and to live on the assumption it is true? Is Mr. Aldous Huxley merely cynical when he declares that in this matter the Church has openly surrendered to what it found it could not master, as it has swallowed many frankly pagan things which pagans, only very dimly Christianized, brought in along with them—the prominence of the Madonna, for example, from the cult of Isis and the like?

In the beginning, the Church took Christ's teaching on this matter very seriously. "But I must live," some of the weaker brethren, reluctant to renounce lucrative things that jarred the Christian conscience, bleated to Tertullian. "Why?" he asks, with a staggering simplicity, and means his question. Why? To attempt to serve God "upon conditions," he bursts out, is hopeless; and he himself, remember, was facing the grim likelihood of a martyr's death every day he wakened. For you never knew when that mad howl, "The Christians to the lions!" might not burst out along the streets. Why? That is the question. Why, in view of our Lord's teaching, must we have this

and this we choose to want? These people felt their lives were Christ's, and for themselves they used only such odds and ends of them as were left over. "Having food and clothes," says Paul, "let us therewith be content." But nowadays have not most of us reversed all that? We plan and think about ourselves. For we must have a vast deal more than food and clothes before we are content, so much so that to Christ we can afford to give only the narrow margin of the pages. Yet the old words still stand there unrepealed:

> "There be certain words broad, plain,
> Uttered again and yet again,
> Hard to mistake or overgloss,
> Accounting this world's gain for loss,
> And bidding us reject the same:
> The whole world lieth, (they proclaim,)
> In wickedness. Come out of it!"

And we are not quite unaffected by them, do go hesitatingly some way towards obeying them. Yet are not Christians climbing, pushing, jostling for the prizes like the rest of folk, not so roughly, and of course strictly conforming to the rules of the game, as others may not be, still using life primarily for the same ends as they? Do we not still persist in judging a man's success largely by the material standards which our Lord dismissed as very nearly negligible. Do we not still desire and covet the comforts against which He warned us, aye, and mean to have such of them as lie within our reach stretched to the uttermost, Christ or no Christ!

Is not a large proportion of the energy of His own Church these days thrown into what is called its social gospel? Thank God for it, you say! Look at your Testament! According to the Judgment parable, are not the only questions to be put to us at the last uncomfortably searching ones as to what we did for the unfortunates around us? They are. And did not our Lord Himself spend much of His own precious time in healing the sick and helping

those in trouble? He did. And are we not told that the one and only way in which to live life as God planned it is to be sympathetic and unselfish and loving and kind? And is not Scripture very scornful of a love that talks, and is touched, and has wet eyes at thought of this and that, and so sinks back upon its own soft comforts and does nothing? All these things are indeed self-evident to the most casual glance at the Gospels. And some of us had better re-read them, lest upon us, too, there leaps that scornful judgment against Edom that we did nothing in a world crowded with pain and suffering and wrong: lest we are guilty of the insane delusion of imagining that holiness is a merely negative thing, a not-doing wrong; have never grasped that first law of the Master we profess to serve that nobody is holy, or can be, unless whole-heartedly he spends himself for others and for God.

And yet does no one feel that somehow there is something wrong somewhere: that, central though all this business about us looks, there is something yet more central which we are forgetting: that the emphasis is steadily slipping down from where Christ placed it? Is there not something odd in the Church of One who said that poverty is a blessed thing, who resented the attempt to make Him a judge and a divider of mere material matters; who was not pleased, but hurt when people flocked about Him, not for spiritual benefits, but, as He said contemptuously, for their chance of loaves and fishes; who was quite sure that a man's life consisteth not in possessing a little more of this world's goods, and held that to make that the end is to throw life away—is it not odd that His Church should be busying itself so earnestly about material things, and an increase in people's comforts? Does it not look as if it were daring to agree with Christ only so far as the crowds agree, leaving in shadow the deeper truths which they won't have, shirking its plain duty which is, surely, to look its fellows in the eyes and tell them that the hurt is deeper than they think, and that their

remedies are merely palliatives at the best, and that, whatever a change in environment and in the social system and in the standard of living may effect, something sorer and far more awkwardly personal than that must come if there is to be real reform, that it is we and they who must be changed, that there is such a thing as sin, and that, till it goes, this world can't be righted? Have we forgotten Plato's scornful comment on the earnest efforts of well-meaning people in his day, "They have filled the city with docks and arsenals and trash of that kind: they have not tried to put temperance and righteousness into the people's souls"? Or Blake's puzzled eyes as he gazed round him at men's hot endeavours in Christ's name?

> "The vision of Christ that thou dost see
> Is my Vision's greatest enemy.
> Thine loves the same world that mine hates;
> Thy heaven's doors are my hell's gates."

It is only seemly that, as we stand looking at the Cross, we should feel uncomfortably that we have too much, that we also must share with our fellows, that, if we are to be true to the name we bear, we also must give our life away. But it is not so well that Calvary should have been made a kind of Hyde Park, where all the discontented gather, claiming something for themselves. Do not all these banners, "Give us our rights," "Better conditions," "Shorter hours," "Something more for me," look most incongruous grouped round the Cross of Sacrifice?

If our chief appeal to men and women is that through Christ they can count on more loaves and fishes and a better time, are we not losing the chivalry of Christ's teaching? Are we not radically altering the essential spirit of a faith which promises not comforts, and not even rights, but the glory of self-sacrifice, the splendour of unselfishness, the prize above all prizes, the wonder of all wonders, likeness to that Christ who threw away all that He had, gained and kept nothing for Himself, but saved a world?

So, in a hundred things. The plain fact is that even yet we don't agree with Christ, have not accepted His axioms, or only partly so, stand hesitating in our mind, one hand on Him, and one still on the world. "I hate men who are half and half," He says.

And even when we have determined for Him, how listless, uninterested, apathetic we are wont to be! Christ's was an ardent nature. When God called He leapt up to His feet: when there was any duty to be done, He flung Himself into it: faced by some need, He met it with His whole being, not bothering about the cost, not reckoning up the sacrifice it meant to Him. And He assumes others will act so too, calmly makes claims that take away the breath, was not at all surprised when men rose up, left all, and followed. For what He felt was, what else could they do, face to face with duty and God's call! Anything less than a complete obedience was certain to be futile. If they were not prepared to be whole-hearted, then they might as well turn back at once. Nothing could come of shilly-shallying. They would lose the world. That doesn't matter. But, so losing it, they would not gain that for which they had half let it go. For religion also claims the whole of one, and nothing less will do.

During the War had a man strolled into a recruiting office and explained that owing to his business and its claims on him, he couldn't afford much time, but that he didn't want to be quite out of it, and would like to do something, and with that offered (what many think is quite enough for God) a quarter of an hour in the morning, and a like period in the evening, always provided, of course, he was not too rushed, the sergeant would have turned upon him with strange and blood-curdling oaths. "We are at war," he would have growled, "and your wretched business is of no importance. The Army claims, not something you think you can spare, but you: all that you have, all that you are, all that you hope to be. If you are not willing to give us that, then out of this!" So Christ

claims you, to work for Him, live for Him, die for Him, the whole of you. To offer to go shares with Him, to grant Him some place in your life is to insult Him. To Him faith means a passion, an enthusiasm, a consuming zeal that eats up all one's life. It is a Love that keeps back nothing. And yet how half-hearted we are. We see the higher and admire it, but—the road to it looks too hot and uncomfortably steep. Something draws and we surrender to it, rise up, stretch out our hands, bend for the leap; and then something else drags us back, and we swither, and hesitate, and so sit down again. The rains of God fall healingly in the hill country of our soul, and for a little every burn roars past in heavy spate: and then it is all over, and the beds are dry again. We pray hot prayers and mean them; yet all the while another part of us keeps whispering, "Not yet! Not yet!" as Augustine, too, found to his confusion.

> "I would I could adopt your will,
> See with your eyes, and set my heart
> Beating by yours,"

cries Browning; and sometimes I both can and do; and "then the good moment goes"; feels sadly he is a mere fluff of thistledown, blown to and fro this way and that with every varying gust. James looks at us and shakes his head! "A man of double mind," he says, well knowing that is a fatal disease. "I hate men who are half and half," says Christ. They make Me sick.

If that is all that you can offer Me, why do you offer even that? He asks. "Why do you call Me Lord! Lord! and yet do not the things that I say?" That was the real puzzle of life to Christ. It didn't take Him aback that many would have none of Him and flatly turned away; nor, on the other hand, did it at all surprise Him that some were swept clean off their feet; that having seen Him, He made life for them. But it did astonish Him that some

should feel His pull upon their hearts, yet not respond; should be able to like Him,—a little, and obey Him—so far, and make a compromise that satisfied themselves between Him and self, His kingdom and the world; should love Him at all, and yet not be enthusiastic and whole-hearted. You are so cautious and non-committal, He says, that it comes to nothing; I must have more than that. Dante saw Judas in the lowest place in hell: yet even he was not the last. For, worse than the worst sinner, there were some colourless indeterminate things for whom heaven had no use, whom even hell disgustedly spat out! Is that to be the end of our poor bits of faith and broken fragments of a half-affection?

This Psalmist tells us he too was once such a man; till one day somehow it came home to him how all creation spends itself whole-heartedly for God, grudges Him nothing, lives and exists only to fulfil His will and eagerly to carry through His august wishes. Day by day the sun rises at His call, night after night the stars appear, none missing, the tides come at His beckoning, the seasons move in punctual procession, the flowers know their own times and leap up to be ready, everywhere order, law, obedience, reverence. And in this mighty mass of things obeying their Creator, only I, he felt, am self-willed, disobedient, out of the vast plan. And the horrible loneliness of sin rushed over him, he the one rebel, he the only outlaw, he alone with no place in that large and intricate design. And with that he was running to God, crying desperately, "Cast me not out! For me, too, find some use! Look," as he puts it in another place, "I also bring to Thee an undivided mind"; am all Thine now, and all Thine always, while I have any being.

If we see Jesus, can we offer less than that? He on His side was so whole-hearted, kept back nothing, gave to us His all. "This is My body," all I have, and it is yours; take it, it is your own, He said. And can we take all that, and

think of tossing Him only such fragments as are left when our own comfort is secured, and our last urgent wish is satisfied? Must we not also break away to Him, crying that we repent of our half-heartedness, our coolness, our lack of enthusiasm, hate ourselves for being that? "Yet cast us not away, dear Lord, for look, we also bring to Thee an undivided mind, are Thine, all Thine, and only Thine, if Thou wilt keep us so."

XIV

THE HEART OF CHRISTIANITY

"If ye then be risen with Christ."—Col. iii. 1.

THIS time our Communion Sunday falls on Easter Day. And, while great branches of the Church always make that the occasion of their supreme celebration, there may be some of us who find, not a little to their own uneasiness, that in their hearts they feel that in the juxtaposition of these two there is something that almost jars, that at least clashes noisily within their mind. It hurts and it confuses them, and yet the fact remains that even the blessed Sacrament, with its sacred memories and irresistible appeal, does not seem quite the natural, nor even the most fitting, note with which to come into God's presence upon this the happiest and most triumphant festival of the whole year. And that brings sharply home to one what we are too apt to forget, that the heart of Christianity, its innermost sanctuary, its most dazzling glory, and the chief source of its power is not even the Cross. It is the open grave.

To me, indeed, the Cross must always be a very central thing. Whenever I wander far from Calvary I, for one, begin to lose sight of the Master, and have to get back. And yet is there not real point in Michelangelo's indignant protest, when he turned in his stormy way upon his fellow-painters and demanded, "Why do you keep filling gallery after gallery with endless pictures of the one ever-reiterated theme, of Christ in weakness, Christ upon the cross, Christ dying, most of all Christ hanging dead? Why do you concentrate upon that

passing episode, as if that were the last word and the final scene, as if the curtain dropped upon that horror of disaster and defeat? At worst all that lasted for only a few hours. But to the end of unending eternity Christ is alive, Christ rules and reigns and triumphs." And, if we would help people to be valiant in their Christian living, it is that we should be ringing out over the world;—that Christ has won, that evil is toppling, that the end is sure, that nothing can for long resist our mighty and victorious Lord. That is the tonic that we need to keep us healthy, the trumpet blast to fire our blood, and send us crowding in behind the Master, swinging happily upon our way, ready and eager to face anything, laughing and singing and recklessly unafraid, because the feel of victory is in the air, and our hearts thrill to it.

But if we keep gazing at it too long, even the Cross may breed a kind of queer inferiority complex in our minds that may have odd and disastrous results, a shrinking terror of the powers arrayed against us, powers that did this even to Christ, a daunted hopelessness of spirit that loses heart, and cowers and flings away its weapons, tamely submitting to these dreadful things. For what else can we do? we bleat.

Paint Christ, cried Michelangelo, not dead but risen, with His foot set in scorn on the split rock with which they sought to hold Him down! Paint Him the Conqueror of death! Paint Him the Lord of life! Paint Him as what He is, the irresistible Victor who, tested to the uttermost, has proved Himself in very deed mighty to save!

That surely is the Easter note; yes, and the spirit that makes Christianity. We come to celebrate a triumph. And we are confronted with the symbols of an agony. And our hearts cry out, almost in a vexed way, "But we are past all that! Good Friday is Good Friday. And, while the darkness lasts, it is well and seemly to gather in it on that little hill; to grope our slow way through it toward that central cross; to

stand there dumb and stunned, looking on Him whom we have pierced, and then with horror at our hands, red with His blood; to gaze and gaze, with all our being, till the thing comes home to us, grows real and vivid and tremendous, rushes our soul, and storms our spirit, and forces us, whether we will or no, to love this mighty Lover who first so loved us. But Easter is Easter. The darkness, blessed be God's name, is gone. And we, who have been redeemed by precious blood, would join ourselves to those who are fully redeemed, would take our part in that long shout of praise and adoration with which yonder they acclaim the Christ who died once, but who is alive for evermore, who was indeed buried in weakness but who rose in power, who reigns upon God's Throne, with the grim principalities that thought to master Him, beaten and down and cringing beneath His triumphing feet!"

Once on a day I had a trying experience. There was to be a wedding in the church, and on that very morning there came word that a brother of the bride had been killed at the front. Whereat the mother, half frenzied with grief, hit on the desperate expedient—yes, and insisted on it—of forestalling the marriage with a brief funeral service! And people in their festal clothes and gay rejoicing spirits were met, to their confusion, by the wailing of the organ sobbing the Dead March! Is there not something of that incongruity in the way we use our faith, something more than a little out of place, that misses the real soul and heart and spirit of it altogether? It was Easter that made the Church. And it is Easter alone that can bring us through with our heads up and our hearts gallantly defiant.

For it comes to us as a call to a higher life, aye, and, thank God, as a proof that you and I can win to it. Always what interests the men of the New Testament in Christ's rising is that they can reproduce it in their own experience. To them His life is not in any way unique, save in degree. For they who are Christ's are bound to follow Christ on to

the very end. They, too, must go about doing good, in their Lord's way: they, too, must take their cross upon their shoulder and throw their life away for others, in His fashion: their evil nature must be nailed down to the cruel wood with bitter blows by a grim resoluteness that can stand unmoved and watch with hard, determined eyes till it is over, and the pleading, writhing, shrieking thing is dead: they, too, must rise with Christ into a new and wonderful being, grow altogether different from what they were; must—aye, and can—become new creatures with new possibilities, new ways, new power.

It is a marvellous story that slow evolution of life from its crude beginnings up and up and up till man appears. How? No one knows. There is so huge a gulf yawning between him and the nearest of his kinsmen. Yet there he stands—a man, with a man's intellect and a man's heart and a man's conscience, living his life in a man's royal way. And that amazing thing was fashioned out of what was at the start only a living greed, an animate selfishness, a grasping, ever-open, ravenous mouth and nothing more. And from that drab, sordid material God's cunning hands have wrought out into being such adorable things—love, and self-sacrifice, and all the glories of humanity, all somehow made from that.

And now in the crude mass of humanity there has appeared something vastly higher still, a wonderful creature (how called into being who can say?), yet there it is, and with Christ's mind, Christ's heart, Christ's ways. And all that strength and loveliness can be fashioned out of the soft, crumbling, unworkable rubble of our tempery, peevish, earthy characters. So these men in the Testament assert with amazing assurance.

And we stare at them bewildered. For what to you is the most extraordinary thing in Scripture? To me it is not even the glorious figure of Christ; but rather this, that that wonderful thing did not dishearten people altogether, did not make them argue that, since this has been made out

of a life like theirs, then their own blundering attempts, in view of this tremendous standard of achievement, are far, far worse than they had ever realized, and they had better give it up. Hood tells us how, as a young child, he had thought in his innocence that the tree-tops touched the very skies. And now, he adds a little sadly,

> "Now 'tis little joy
> To know I'm farther off from heaven
> Than when I was a boy."

So, looking at Christ's easy mastery of life, at the perfection He wove out of the threads that we so soil and twist and break, surely we must see with despair that we are vastly farther off from the true goals and from the possibilities we should have reached than we had ever dreamed, so far, indeed, that we might well be tempted to stop trying altogether. "What's the use?"

But in the Testament it is not so things acted on men's minds. Rather the fact of Christ stung them to a tremendous, an illimitable, an insane-looking hope. You go to hear a mighty pianist; but on returning home it doesn't occur to you to sit down at your instrument and say, "I too will play like that. Now listen!" For you know that you can't. And yet that is precisely what these people do! They come on Christ, and stand stock-still a long time, gazing at Him in astonishment, and then they draw a deep, satisfied sigh: "I, too, am going to be that," they say, and mean it, and at once set to work upon it hopefully, and are entirely sure that one day that wild dream of theirs will to a certainty come true. Of course it will, says Paul. "If ye then be risen with Christ," he throws out, taking for granted that amazing assumption. To his mind that is the whole point and meaning of the thing. If you are Christ's at all, then of course you have left behind you the old life as a thing dead, and over, and forgotten, and are now living in His new and glorious way—are, or else can—quite surely can.

And remember that vital theology is never a mere theory thrown out on chance towards life, always it is the gathering together into a formula of the results of innumerable patient and first-hand experiments that have shut one up to one inescapable conclusion.

When the people of the Testament tell us that no one of us all need limp on in the old lame way for one day further, that there is no sin to which we must go down, no habit that we cannot shatter, no victory we cannot win, they are bringing us news proved and authenticated beyond questioning in their own lives. And therefore for us to continue as we are is now a dreadful thing. For, in view of what Christ offers us, and what they have experienced, there is no longer any necessity for it. That that we are we need no longer be; and if we remain only that, it is henceforward only through our own deliberate choice, because we like it, or because we can't be bothered taking the trouble to break free, or because we are happy enough in our present condition, or at least feel that it will do; because the grub won't take the wings and glory of the butterfly, but is content with its slow, arching, painful progress and its own dull life.

And it is often so. With incredulous eyes that can hardly believe what stares at them, Paul sees that the great mass of people are in no way interested in the news he brings to them.

> "Bound who should conquer, slaves who should be kings,
> Hearing their one hope with an empty wonder,
> Sadly contented in a show of things,"

their faces never light, and in a little while they stretch themselves, and yawn, and drift away to other things. As if anything could matter but this, that they might have, this he is pressing on them, this that is theirs for the taking! And they don't want it, and won't have it; let it lie!

Think of a slave who might be done for ever with that misery of his—that shrinking figure, those cowed and furtive eyes, that timorous elbow thrown up all too quickly, ever

ready for the expected blow—who might win back self-respect, and be a man again instead of that mere ugly thing he is. And he, given his choice of that, elects to remain this horror! You can be free, man! Free!

Think of an invalid who might have given back to him the glow of health, and full, rich days crowded with interests; and he is satisfied with that travesty of a life he knows, that sickly atmosphere of medicines, and thin gruels, and half-hours dozing by the fire as an excitement to be long remembered, and pottering walks of fifty yards with short and shuffling steps as an adventure almost dreadfully exciting! And he wishes for nothing better, he who could be well; might really live the life of a real man! And you and I could rise with Christ, could be done with our humiliating failure; could become like Jesus, our wonderful Lord, living our life too in that glorious way. And with such possibilities within our reach, are we really going to do nothing, and drift on just what we are, content with that?

Suppose that somewhere in the lonely glens or in the gusty western isles a schoolmaster, his head bowed to the storms, should make his way across the bleak moors to a little white cottage cowering from the wild sea blasts behind its stack of peats, and should say to a pupil of his, "Laddie, I have been watching you; and I have come to say to you, I who have been out in the great world and know, that if you dare to venture to the university you can go far." With that a sudden vista, a new universe, would open out before the boy who, until then, had had never a thought or hope except to potter about the barren wind-swept croft until he die. Let him push at that opening door, let him seize boldly on his chance, and anything may happen. But if his people will not pinch and starve to let him have his opportunity, or if his own heart fail him, if he shrink back fearfully from that mysterious unknown world that lies out yonder beyond his horizon, the door will slam, the chance will pass, and he will live a niggardly, bare life, and die at last among the

manure-heaps he chose. But to the end the schoolmaster will hold to it, will know, that it was in him, only he had not a heart big enough to put it to the proof ; and it went out. The pity of it and the shame if our chance also flickers and dies ! Mr. Aldous Huxley stood watching an Indian peasant gloatingly seizing upon an unspeakably sordid chance that came his way—his hands and heart all eagerly given to that grossness. How singular a work, he mused, for a cousin of the angels, for a full brother of Raphael and the Lord Buddha and Beethoven ! And you and I might be like Christ, and we choose this we are !

A psalmist has a very haunting saying about Joseph in his evil days, long buried out of sight of men in his deep dungeon, forgotten by the happy world hurrying to and fro about its own affairs in the blessed light and air so far above him, alone there in the dark, save for the rats scurrying across him, his ankles raw and festering sores from the long chafing of the fetters, his dreams so many mocking faces leering at him in his misery. Yet his heart did not give ; his courage never faltered. But even there, with all hope out, he watched and waited and expected till " the promise of God came true, the promise of God that tested him." That tested him ! You notice that ? That tested him ! It is a desperate thing to meet with Christ. For once we do, we must close with Him or reject Him ; must take His offered gifts or else push them impatiently aside ; must be the better for Him or the worse. To the depths of our being He, too, tests us, and reveals unerringly what manner of souls we are. And how is it with you and me ? You can become like Christ ! Given that message here to-day, does your heart thrill at the thought of it, and do your hands leap out to clutch it, and does your soul resolve that, whatever else you win or lose, this you are going to gain ? Or do you listen blankly, and rise up and go your way, back to the life you left, precisely as you came ? Do you not want this thing ?

Want it? you say. Of course I do! But I can't have it, and I know that now. I have been often at the Sacrament, often been moved by Christ; and I have learned from long experience that it all passes, in my case at least, in a gush of cheap emotion, nothing more. I am too old for anything to happen now. The branches are too gnarled to bend. Tug at them, and they do give a little, but spring back at once into their set position as soon as you let go. My ways are fixed; my character is formed; the channels are long cut in which my life must run on to the end; my feet turn of themselves now into worn and beaten paths.

> "I am not what I have, nor what I do,
> But what I was I am, I am even I."

And it is too late to change now. I know only too well it is a poor affair that I have fashioned; but it is me. And even Christ's drastic remedy is far too superficial to meet my desperate case. Steeling myself, I could pluck out my eye, and might cut off my hand; but the essential me I can't shake off, nor break away, nor leave behind, however hard I run from it.

You can. That is the fact that we have got to grasp. You can. I do not care how old you are. "Ask him," his parents said; "he is of age, and he was always blind, was born so and has never seen." Yet he was healed. "It must be nearly forty years," the people told each other, "since as a boy I first saw that cripple carried up the temple steps to the stance he made his own so long. And he is cured." I am not interested over how engrained it is. For think of Zacchæus or of Matthew, or of Mary Magdalene. Did they not tell each other every possible devil had its home within her heart? Yet she was cleansed! It may take time. But what of that? "I learned," says Plutarch doggedly, "that anger is not incurable if one wants to cure it." It may mean endless pains! And who would grudge them for so wonderful a prize? Do you remember that old Buddhist

who turned on his masterful passions, and hurled his truculent defiance in their faces. "Although you conquer me a million times, I will spring up again a million and one times," he cried; "will never, never, never yield!"

And it might happen far more swiftly than we think. "Thanks be to God," cries Paul, "who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." There evidently is a man who feels that he is winning, who knows it indeed, is sure he has got hold of something which enables him to face anything life or death can bring, and see it through with honour. He has his dreams. But they are not mere thin and insubstantial things, far off, and never drawing any nearer. They keep coming true. He has grim difficulties. But he finds that he can clear a steady way through all of them. Daily he meets temptations that bestride the path and dispute his advance, and ugly, venomous things they are. But they go down before his rush. This is a man, in short, fit for his life and able for his task. It is a happy condition. For there is no more miserable object than a man pitchforked into a job too big for him, and conscious of his own incompetence; a hunted soul, always just dodging the ruin never far away, and which must seize him in the end; and meantime never keeping step with duty, but always lagging farther and farther in the rear, while a huge mass of work undone keeps heaping itself up into a threatening avalanche which, when it moves, must overwhelm him in an irretrievable disaster. And it may move at any hour. And so, blundering, uneasy, hopeless, he dribbles sloppily from one failure to another, making a bare escape from hour to hour.

But isn't that a too vivid picture of the lives of some of us? We know that we are not efficient in the high and spiritual matters, are not putting things through as they ought to be done. We see what we are meant to be; but we can't be it. Obstinately it evades our futile hands, for ever clutching, and for ever missing. We also have our dreams, but they remain mere dreams: our difficulties throw and master us; and our

temptations have rushed us so often that now, at their first challenge, we are apt to sign an ignominious surrender which is not a peace.

It is no use telling us that we have nothing to do with results, no use saying with Stevenson "that our business here is not to succeed but to continue to fail in good spirits," no use declaring that it takes greater valour doggedly to hold on in defeat than to charge, all a flame of fire, to assured victory. No doubt! Only this isn't a game that we are playing; and, even if it were, he is a maddening partner who does not play to win. God has a will He wishes to have done, and we are bungling it; He has created us for something, and it can't be this that we are making of our lives. And what are we to do? I'll tell you. Turn to the seventh chapter of Romans and you will find a man at his wits' end, clean desperate, bewildered near to madness because nothing will go right. How he has tried and tried, and always he has failed! How he has forged unshakeable resolutions, hardening them in the hot fires of grim determination, yet they have all too often buckled and broken off short in his hand, leaving him at the pinch unarmed and at his sneering enemy's mercy! He knows what he should be, but he can't be it: he hates the thing he is, and yet he can't refrain from it. Against his will, out of the dark slums in his heart there pour wild, obscene mobs of horrible and unclean things that seize the government and make a chaos out of order, and carry fire and evil everywhere through his confusion of a life. Like a creature in a trap that struggles and shows its teeth and gnaws at its own limb—anything, everything, to get away—he also writhes and twists and tears; but always the trap holds.

Could there be two figures more unlike than this desperate, despondent, beaten soul and that other with his confidence and his firm step and steady eyes? And yet they are not two, but one. And what has made the difference? Simply that he has met with Christ: and that that Christ has come

into his life. Everything else is as it was ; and yet, because of that one fact, everything has been changed.

That is what the faith does to those who really use it. Yet is our religion effecting anything at all like that in us, building up order where there has been always mere confusion, bringing us victory where we have always known defeat, pulling down the frowning strongholds that defy us, enabling us to do all things, with no limiting exceptions, proving itself the very power of God at work within our lives ?

Oh, give us time, you say. Not yet, of course ; but we hope something will come of it all some far-off day. That is the curse of religion, answers Dora Greenwell, that habit of translating into a vague future tense what Christ offers us now. We can do nothing in the meantime, reported the panic-stricken spies ; it were folly to try. It will take generations before, trained into a military people, we can face these giants, or hope to storm these huge walled towns ! " We are well able to go up against them now," urged the bold minority. But nobody would listen, and whole forty years were lost, and lost quite needlessly ! And we too throw away so much because we don't believe the promises, don't put Christ to the test, don't credit even He can do much for us—yet.

The fact is you are living in the seventh of the Romans, with its fog and its damps and its low marshy ground. And that is no place for a Christian man to linger in for long. Up, man, and climb to your own native land in the eighth chapter, with its fresh, invigorating, clean hill air ; and it will put new strength into your soul. With Christ there is no need to drag on in our futile fashion even one day more.

Don't you remember how year in year out, the Bastille, that grim symbol of the tyranny beneath which an unhappy people groaned, frowned down upon their misery—huge, threatening, impregnable. And they, poor souls, could do nothing but glare up impotently at it, cursing beneath

their breath—till one day at long last, driven beyond endurance, they swarmed out in sheer madness to what seemed an obviously impossible attack upon what could not fall. And in reality they found it furnished with one day's provisions and no more, garrisoned by only thirty troopers and some eighty tottering veterans, led by an indeterminate and futile mind; and in four little hours the utterly impossible was done, and the Bastille was down! So if we were but resolute, but looked to Jesus Christ, habits we have allowed to cow us would fall in a week or two, and we be done with them, and free! Here is a man, I said, who feels that he is winning, knows it indeed, is sure that he has come on something that enables him to face anything that life can bring, and see it through with honour. And that man should be you!

But how does the thing work? you ask: how does one reach it? How can I begin to make it really effective in my character? Yes: that's the point. Most of us preachers are like agitators rousing dissatisfaction in men's minds, leaving them soured and unhappy; but with no constructive policy how things can be put right. And yet we have that very thing; are here to ring it out. How? how? That is what we would learn:

> "Life and death make a joyful Lent,
> So they lead us to Easter day."

But how are we to reach it and begin to this newness of life?

There is no way to Easter but by Calvary. What we require is something that will push us into action, that will make us really choose what we know we should choose, yet do not choose. That is the reason of the Sacrament and the use of the Cross. Before you finally determine what you are going to do with life, be sure that you have all the facts before you. And this is one of them, this Cross. Have you remembered it? Here is one Claimant! Have you given consideration to His rights? Don't say (how can you

upon Calvary ?) that it is useless trying. For, look ! does not the Cross prove that, in the same world as God, colossal failure is not failure, but a door that opens straight out into triumph for a loyal heart ! Look ! look ! keep looking ! For it will help you, force you, lay compulsion on you, till your hands leap out to take the cup and all it typifies. The Sacrament ! The recruit's oath of allegiance ! The vow that the young soldier swore before the battalion he was joining, that all he had, his life itself, was not his any longer, but the Emperor's, and that he would be true to him till death !

Yet stay ! Are you quite certain that you understand ? That recruit's oath took him into strange places—many a lonely vigil, many a breathless jeopardy ; meant weariness and wounds and perhaps a life tossed away with disdain rather than break or yield. " Dare you drink of the cup that I shall drink of ? " asks the Master. Dare you ? Look into its depths again ! There are grace and forgiveness there, most surely there ! Yes, but far more ! There are self-sacrifice, you understand, and loyalty, and a determination that you too are going to live in this new way. And dare you ? Do you answer, looking straight into Christ's eyes, " I can, I will, I do ; and, please God, I shall stand to it " ?

Why, then, the grub is changing to the butterfly ; and Christ's power is at work in you, making you like Himself ; and the poor shuffling thing you are is putting on His ways. For you Easter has really dawned : in you the new life has indeed begun. And as God, once He had in His wonderful hands the first crude hint of something dimly human, out of that lowly, still half-animal thing, fashioned in the end a Shakespeare, so, by far more marvellously still, from that faint breath of the new life in you He will make Jesus Christ ; or at least such a glorious soul, so much akin to Him, as to be indistinguishable from Him, a thing that once was only you, that drabness you are now, but which then will have risen to a radiant splendour, with Christ's character, Christ's heart, Christ's very ways.

XV

CHRIST'S UNCONDITIONAL OFFER TO ANY ONE

"Without Me ye can do nothing."—JOHN xv. 5.

IN this bewilderingly wealthy passage, where every phrase is a long and enticing vista leading far out into the deeps of spiritual truth, and every verse another glorious constellation swimming into our ken, and the whole parable rich as the heavens on a frosty night, with splendours heaped on splendours, and majesties on majesties, till the brain grows confused, and the eye fails, and still there is how vastly more to see—what can one do, and where should one begin? To me, at least, it has always seemed that the real root of this glorious flower is these grave words, slipped in almost casually though they seem. For grave words indeed they are.

Our Lord often lets fall something of the amazement that He felt at the sheer, gaping stupidity of the great mass of us men and women, at the insane and unbelievable prodigality with which we throw away the wonderful chances that God has contrived for us. Here are we, each with a life in our hands, a whole, rich, human life with which such splendours can be done; and out of all the glorious possibilities crowding in upon us we are apt to choose so meanly and squalidly; to run ourselves out of breath for poor empty nothings which, even if we do secure them, can do very little for us, and can last only for a poor moment at the best. "The worldly hope men set their hearts upon," mused Omar Khayyám, looking queerly at his perspiring fellows, so rushed and hot and prodigiously in earnest, what is it, even if it does come true? Only a thin sprinkling

of snow on the hot face of a desert, that must melt as soon as the sun touches it; worse than that, echoes Burns unconsciously, only a snowflake falling on a river, seen and gone, and there is nothing except the black soundless waters racing by. And you choose that! cries Christ. You, with such gallantries and chivalries within your reach! You fools! He flashes at us, stung for once into contempt; you utter fools! Still playing with your childish toys! You grown up, and life running out!

Yet hardly any one pays heed to Him. For they see only what is visible; and promises are insubstantial stuff, they think.

> "What is love? 'Tis not hereafter;
> Present mirth hath present laughter;
> What's to come is still unsure."

Better snatch at what they can, and chance the great beyond.

But even that is not the most sobering portion of our Lord's reading of humanity, but rather this which He so underlines and emphasizes here, that even those of us who have some dim idea of what life is for, and who do try to make some worthier use of it, effect so tragically little, are so largely baffled. We see, but we can't reach; we stretch out hands, but they come short; we hope and strive and pray with some reality of purpose—even some desperation, it may be—and yet, do what we will, temper and selfishness will storm our hearts time after time; and things we loathe won't snap, tug at them how we may; and, though our souls do climb upon occasion to the clear air of the heights, always we waken up to find ourselves back in the stuffy plain among the ugly sights, the smells, the jostling pressure of the irritating crowds, ourselves the same bedraggled, dusty figures that we ever were. As a Spanish mystic cries despondently:

> "It is not pleasure now that makes me stray,
> But habits fought and striven against in vain.
> I hate the sin, and yet I sin alway."

Yes, says Christ, I have been watching you and see that you can do, not something, though less than enough, but just nothing at all, nothing that really counts, nothing that tells, nothing that matters. All your hardiest resolutions are like fading branches torn from a vine and lying out on the hot path, withering quickly into mere dry sticks, fit only to be gathered up and cast over the vineyard wall, to vanish in a sudden crackle of fire and a brief billowing of smoke. And so an end of us, and all we were, and all we tried to be—cast out, it seems, as a thing unwanted, and of which even God can make nothing at all!

Some resent that verdict, thinking they are doing well enough, as well at least as can be reasonably expected from hearts as frail as ours on roads as slippery as those we have to travel. And others know that the truth is with Christ, and yet they are not trying now to live up to His great ideals for us, are beaten, have accepted a poor second best as all that is possible for them at least, turn irritably from Christ, like De Quincey from Coleridge—"he wanted better bread than can be made out of wheat"—and so peevishly pushing aside His standards as impossible, try themselves by others much less drastic, the conventions round them and the like, "testing themselves by themselves," as Paul says, looking no higher than their own level, and so are naturally satisfied. As Goethe hated to draw on pure white paper, because, he said, it was too trying a background for his efforts and made them look ridiculous, as a grimier one did not, so carefully they avert their eyes from Christ and that gallant life He lived, and so doing win a cheap contentment.

But there are those who can't forget, who hate to be as inefficient as they know they are. And yet do what they will they cannot reproduce life as they see it ought to be. Their hot hands soil the paper; irritably they rub out, and diligently they draw in, and then frantically rub out again, till they have rubbed right through, and still their clumsy

fingers cannot get it anything like right. They know that what Christ says is true. And yet how terrible it is that He, with His kind eyes, should take our life into His hands and look at it and say, But this is not even worth marking, is not the least like life as it ought to be lived, and so write "Nothing" on it. Nothing!—after all our efforts—nothing!

These, I say, are grave words. And yet to me they are immeasurably hopeful, so that when hard pressed elsewhere, I fall back on them as on an impregnable redoubt, and can face any doubt and silence every fear. For evidently there is no misunderstanding, and the Christ who offers us such wonderful things entirely realizes that in ourselves we are mere feckless, blundering, impossible souls. There is no fear that if we take Him at His word and venture to Him, He may look us up and down and say, "Oh, well, you know, there are limits to what even I can do, and lengths beyond which even God's grace cannot reach." There are no limits. He says so Himself. And the physician who is so hearteningly certain of a cure begins with a really desperate diagnosis.

Confucius, for his part, admitted irritably that he must claim some modicum of common sense and spiritual acumen in a would-be disciple—for otherwise I would be simply wasting time, said he. But I will take any one, says Christ —yes, any one at all, with no equipment whatsoever. You needn't tell Me, sullenly, that you are not the man for this adventure, or, hopelessly, that you have no spiritual aptitudes I know. You can't dishearten Me concerning your particular case by pouring out what a complete mess you have made of things. For I am not surprised by that; I said it would be so; I told you in blunt words that, without Me, you could do nothing. And it is on that understanding, on the basis of your utter incapacity apart from Me, and that I must do everything vital for you, and that only through what I can give you have you any chance at all of winning through;—it is, in short, admitting the worst you have to say, and knowing far more against you than you do yourself

that I am willing to accept you, that I am sure that I can manage for you, that I plead with you to take from Me what I don't simply think, but what I know, can come true —yes, and true in you!

So that these glorious things we hear of in the Gospels are not just lovely fairy tales with no connection with our muddy, smoky, too real earth, and as far away from us simple people as is the profound learning of some mighty scholar, or as the wealth of a millionaire from some poor soul who looks a moment after him in all his luxuries, and so turns back, as cold and pinched and shivery as ever, to the bleakness of his own bare garret. Christ's offer is made freely and without condition. "None is excluded," Bunyan says. And with that the gate into the boundless possibilities there are in Christ is flung wide open to the most hopeless and impossible bungler of us all. Look! says Christ. You see that poor stick lying in the dust, and shrivelling in the hot sun; and then that vine, laden with branches, loaded down with heavy clusters. That is the difference that I can make in you; and I will do it if you give Me any chance at all.

Tillotson, to be sure, once said very wisely that it is dangerous to found your theology upon a metaphor. But this one at least does not seem either dark or hard to follow. Christ looks at us; and I can make that life of yours immeasurably fruitful, so He says; and you yourself abundantly helpful, both to God and men—so clean and brave and big-hearted that others, meeting you, will go upon their way with a new light on their faces, and a new hope in their hearts, surer by far of God and of Christ's power in people's lives; and He, seeking for some soul upon whom He can depend, coming on you will say, Here is one I can absolutely trust. "Much fruit," He says; "abundantly," He promises; "what ye will," so He declares. These are large words, and Christ speaks them to you and me. He has given us "great and precious promises," says one who knew Him well, and heard Him doing it. And indeed He has, so

great that we are apt to let them lie, as obviously not meant for us. And yet they are, the very best of them! It will work out in you, He says. Dead stick, or all but dead though you may be to-day, you also will be covered over with the glory of all this I am promising.

Here are we, so vexing, surely, to God's holy eyes. Ah, cries Christ, but a day is coming when you will stand before Him, and even He will see nothing in you that He could wish away. We are so crudely, so spontaneously, so innately selfish, with hands that, like an infant's, leap out of themselves and grab at any glistering thing. Yet we are called to be "partakers of the divine nature," are to put on the very ways and character of God; yes, and we shall! "O Thou Giver of Thyself," cries Cynewulf in a great tribute. And our life, too, will one day be a glad and eager generosity. We are so frankly and incorrigibly unlike Christ. But I will share My mind with you, He says, till it grows your mind too. And we must take it in that that is what our Lord believes of us, what He is sure that He can really make of you and me.

But how? The answer to that, too, is wonderful and very heartening. I am quite sure that we have intellectualized religion far too much; that in its essence it must be a very simple thing. It is, says Christ. For how does the branch bear? Simply by clinging to the vine; and the vine does the rest—yes, even gives the strength to cling! Untiringly its roots draw from the earth all that the branch requires: hour after hour, unseen, the sap is regularly given, and so the clusters form and swell and ripen to the harvest. And so, says Christ, if only you will enter into fellowship with Me, will give Me a place—the central place—in your life, will let My influence play on you day after day, I will do all the rest.

It is as simple, then, as that! We have a wonderful Partner, have at our back all that there is in Jesus Christ to draw on freely. We can't fail unless Jesus fail. And

not till the vine sickens and droops and dies can the branches lack what they require, for its whole life is to supply them. Only, says Christ, live with Me, and look to Me, and learn of Me, and take from Me, and I will do the rest.

And I for one believe it. For science has taught us that environment has a tremendous power that can change a plant or a creature beyond recognition. And our own life has shown how a strong personality, playing upon a weaker, can uplift it high above itself, and endow it permanently with a glory that is in no way native to it. A brave man, simply by being brave beside us, gives us courage: and a wise man can steady our uncertain, flustered, stumbling mind almost without saying a word. And there is not a doubt that Christ, simply by passing through the world, has ennobled humanity, has lifted it almost bodily to a higher plane of being, and those who have stood nearest to His influence to a glorious newness of life. Doesn't Vasari tell us that the whole of the Renaissance had its origin in this, that men saw in the faces of Giotto's pictures a nobility they had not recognized in humanity for themselves; and, so seeing, felt that they belonged to a bigger breed than they had understood, and must walk worthier of it? And those who have come upon Jesus Christ, who have seen life as He lived it, know from that moment that their own life just won't do, must become bigger and braver and more chivalrous and liker His. From those meagre records of Him in the Gospels, glorious flowers have sown themselves broadcast across the earth. You will find them now even in the most unlikely places—yes, blooming bravely in the window-boxes of mean streets, where there seems never a glint of sun to coax them out—the glorious red of a new courage, the deeper blue of a new loyalty, the purer white of a new purity, the splendid gold of a new thankfulness and praise. And if you too will only live beside Him, you also won't be able to act meanly, not with those eyes upon you; and for you also He will set

a higher standard, below which you will not be able to linger and preserve your self-respect. Why, one man buys a car, and others round about him feel that here is a new rate of speed, and that they can't be left behind, and with that they too take to buying cars. And do you think that you could live with Jesus Christ, and not be influenced and mastered by Him ?

Aye, but are you living with Him—there's the point —now are you ? What place has Jesus really in your life ? Do you, for example, ever pray ? And when ? And how long ? And how often ? Or do you ever read the Gospels, soaking your mind in our Lord's words and point of view, as the older generation used to do, till when they prayed they used an exquisite, because a Bible, English ? At the cross-roads of life have you a little shrine where, before turning left or right, you consult Jesus Christ ? Is His will the determining factor in all your plans, the thing that matters, and that must be learned, and once learned must be followed ?

I know that once upon a day it was so. But do you notice how Christ underlines that word " continue " ? " If you abide in Me," He says, and again that " abide, " and once more and insistently that same " abide " ! We all have moods when we are won for Him, and in youth we had great dreams. When they began to build the Cathedral at Seville they determined to make it so wonderful that the world " would think they had been mad." You also started out on life with big and valorous plans. There were to be no half-measures for you, but you were going to follow heroically in Christ's very footsteps. And have the currents parted you from Him ? Have the conventions mastered you ? Can you laugh now at your old idealism ? Ah ! don't do that ! That is the last and crowning infamy, that that poor thing you are should sneer at what you once were, and still more at all you might have been ! Isn't what has gone wrong simply this—that the storms of life have detached

you more or less from the vine, so that you are hanging limply from it by a thread, and the sap cannot reach you in a steady flow, and so there is no fruit, and the very leaves are yellowing, and your soul is growing dry? Get nearer Christ: that is the only remedy. Catch sight of Him again, and it will still work in your soul.

Don't you remember Peter—poor, foolish, blundering, frightened Peter—cursing and swearing, and hotly denying all that was really dearest to him; and how just then the crowd happened to open out somewhat, and he saw Christ, and in an instant had come to himself? And can't you see Him, not near to you as He used to be, but far off now, still Him? Look, man! Surely you do! Look there, before your very eyes! Don't you go out into the night to weep! What is the use of that? No, push your way to Him; thrust through the throng; refuse to be intimidated by the soldiery; tell them your errand and they will let you pass; put you your back against your Master's back, and cry, "Here am I—His, and caring not who knows it, ready to live for Him, suffer for Him, die for Him, but not to lose sight of Him ever again, cost what it may."

And it may cost! For life may thrust you into some share in His agony. Never you mind; keep Christ in sight. It may lay violent hands on you, spit in your face, force a cross on your shoulder also. Still, if Christ takes the road to Calvary, go staggering after Him. For it is fatal to lose sight of Him. It may nail you down to some hard fate. If He is there, and if your eyes are on His face, He will quite surely bring you through. And you will learn to see Him clearer, to know Him better, to love Him more than you have ever done. Don't you remember that it was a most unlikely soul—the last in the whole world, one would have said—who first saw Jesus as He really is; a convict, and justly condemned at that; an outlaw fresh from that stormy life of his, and with blood, not a doubt, upon his hands—a man upon a cross? But his eyes fastened on that fellow-

Sufferer of his, and the astounding truth somehow came home to him. "Have you no fear of God," he cried to his poor cursing comrade, "you who are suffering the same punishment as He?" And so seeing Him, the man was changed, and his whole being revolutionized, till our Lord told him He looked forward to his comradeship in the beyond. If only you will keep in sight of Christ, He will do all the rest for you, as surely as the vine provides unfailingly all that the branches can require for an abundant harvest.

And for the rest, says Christ, God will come into your life and play His part. For your life is His life, which He has fashioned for His ends, and He will make you ready to accomplish them. There is the vine, there are the branches, and there is the Husbandman! Ah! you cry happily, if God is coming in to aid us, all is indeed well. I wonder, will you say so at the story's end?

Our Lord has, of course, many things to say concerning God. Sometimes He likens Him to the sun streaming down upon us in that ungrudging liberality that keeps back nothing. And we know that is true. At others He compares Him to a soft rain falling healingly upon dry lives and tired hearts withering in the sultriness of life. And we have had experience of that. Again, He tells us of His faithful kindness even to the most prodigal and wayward, with no shadow of excuse to urge. And so He has been often toward ourselves. But here He is the Husbandman with the sharp pruning-knife, that cuts sorely and deep. And that also is true.

Our Lord was speaking to a band of men upon the verge of shattering disappointment, heart-break, agony, who in a few hours, near madness, nearer blasphemy, would be looking up towards God, and wildly asking, Why? And there are always so many like that, whose lives have grown incomprehensible to them, and God's ways utterly bewildering, if He is really love! It's all mere chance, say some, Shakespeare for one, in certain moods. Like wanton boys tearing the

wings from helpless flies, so the Fates torture us, out of sheer cruelty. No, says Christ, Himself within a few hours of His cross, it is not chance but God; and there is meaning in it, and this, too, is leading on to fullness of being in ourselves, and to furthering the ends for which we were created.

It is punishment, cry others. Well, if it is so, who would grumble? There is nothing disheartening in that; for surely it must mean that, even after all the sorry past, God still has hopes for us, and thinks that even yet things can be righted in us! If the great Surgeon looks at you gravely, and says in His compassionate way, "Yours is indeed a serious case, and even I can't spare you pain. Your one chance is an operation that will stab your very heart," lay yourself down upon the table unafraid; and, though remembering that there can be no anæsthetic, but that you must bear the whole terrific agony of it, look up into His eyes, and say, "I will not wince, nor falter, nor cry out! Cut Thou the sin away!"

But here Christ tells us a wonderful thing, that sometimes suffering, so far from being punishment, is a reward! "If it bear fruit," He says, "He prunes it back, that it may bear more fruit." It is thorough and drastic work, that yearly pruning. For all the trailing greeneries and prettinesses are cut ruthlessly away, and the vine left a mutilated thing, a mere stump, fastened to a stick! Yet so it must be, if there is to be a harvest worth the gathering. And when God disciplines a soul, sometimes, at least, it is because He trusts it, and believes in it, and feels that here is one with which He can do something more than ordinary. Many a man has seen for himself when looking back over his life, that it was what he had to suffer that called out in him anything notable at all. "To make a man," says Richter, "there is no fare like bread and water; and I know, for often I had only the water!" And even Anatole France thanks God as for His supreme gift to him, that through the Divine Mercy to him, he was born

poor. And Meredith is sure that nothing but "hard weather" in our life can put an edge to our mind and give courage to our soul. And so on endlessly. But Christ goes vastly deeper, talks of the privilege of suffering, the proud distinction of this honouring confidence in us of God! And is it not so if we use it right? Did not Christ Himself become the Christ we know through suffering; and would He not have been an infinitely smaller Christ, with far less usefulness to God, and infinitely less appeal to us, without that cross of horrors? When God called Him, Here, He thought, is a soul with which I can do anything, can teach men more than they have ever seen, can lead them higher than they have ever climbed, can save this whole sin-sick and blundering world, if only He will bear enough, can dare to pay the inevitable price that can alone fit Him for His tremendous office. And so He sent upon Him cruel disappointments, and Christ's faith grew all the stronger for that discipline; and He allowed sorrows to gather in on Him, and Christ looked toward Him with unfaltering eyes; more and yet more until there came the Cross itself, and even from that Christ's spirit cried, "It is all dark to Me, and I can't see the road or end, but I am trusting Thee, and will trust, let what will befall!" It was because, so exercised, that dauntless faith of His remained unshaken, that He was lifted to His lonely glory, and became no Teacher merely, and no Prophet only, but the Saviour of the world. Because it bore fruit, it was pruned back, seemingly how cruelly, that it might bear more fruit. And because of that, as our Lord said Himself, if old Papias is to be trusted, "the days will come in which vines will spring up, each having ten thousand stems, and on each stem ten thousand branches, and on each branch ten thousand shoots, and on each shoot ten thousand clusters, and on each cluster ten thousand grapes. And when any saint shall have seized one cluster, another shall cry, 'I am a better cluster, take me; through me praise the Lord.'" Of one vine that is how profoundly true.

And if you too are being disciplined in measure, God is making that same offer of high privilege and usefulness to you. He lays compulsion on no soul. If you want only ease and flabbiness and a soft, comfortable life, to that He will reluctantly abandon you. But if you have a soul for something higher (and that sorrow of yours, says Christ, proves God knows that you have, if you will only give it play), higher and higher will He lift you, more and more gloriously will He enable you to bear and do and be. At any stage you can shrink back, and cower, and falter; and, if you do, then He may have to leave you there. But if you put yourself in His wise hands, and neither whimper nor cry out, but submit to be pruned yet closer, yet more sorely, yet more near the quick, a day will come when you will have a share in these tremendous promises that dazzle the eyes to blindness with their splendour, when you will fill up and do something to complete the sufferings of Christ, will have some real share in His enterprise of saving this great world, will catch some dim reflection of the very nature of that wonderful God who for our worthless sakes gave all that even He could give, bore all that ever He could bear, sat silent and with bowed head through the horror upon Calvary, loving the world as hugely, as immeasurably, as unthinkably as that! And you and I are to be lifted up so high above our natural selfishness that we too shall become like that, if we are ready to pay down the price! Well, are we? Everything, it seems, depends on that!

XVI

A MESSAGE FOR GREY DAYS

"If the vision tarry, wait for it, for it will come: and it will not be late."—HAB. ii. 3 (Moffatt).

THERE, to begin with, is a claim on you and me, a warning that if we wish to be really helpful to God and our fellows we must cultivate a certain calm and equanimity of mind, a certain valour and imperturbability of spirit, that believes in righteousness and the success of its cause much too stout-heartedly to grow afraid even if things do drag a bit, that knows God far too well to think of doubting Him even if His promises seem slow of foot, and our dreams lag, and the time grows longer than we hoped. The function of religious people, so this tired man heard God saying to his heart in dark and trying days when there was not much to encourage, what is it? What do I set them in the world to do? What is it that I ask of them? Is it not largely this—to keep cool and unfidgety when other folk are growing flustered about things; to look out upon this confusing life with steady eyes, when those around them, badly scared, have taken to glancing back across their shoulders, and there is that ominous feeling of panic in the air; to trust Me, not only when that is easy and the sun is shining, but when there is most need for faith, yes, and some valour in the offer of it? Suppose the times are disappointing and disquieting, that I seem to have forgotten, appear not to care; that in spite of all your efforts nothing, so you judge, is happening. Still, don't get nervy and irritable,

fussy and on edge. Don't toss your dream impatiently away, as something that evidently can never come to pass in this dusty workaday world of drab realities. Still hold to it, work for it, believe in it, expect it. If the vision tarry, wait for it: grant Me some loyalty, and some tenacity of purpose, and some common courage. Give Me that—long enough—and we win.

It must, surely, be a little daunting to ardent spirits to note how often in the Scriptures that is God's message to His people. Age after age, apparently, earnest souls feel hotly that the world is out of joint, that something must be done to mend things; yes, and they see what that is, and start up eagerly to set about it, sure that they can put it through. And, age after age, in a little they are standing puzzled, and daunted, and confused, with their resolution oozing from them, tired and dispirited. For, do what they will and can, so little seems to come of it. And it is like that last wild tumult of a fight in Lyonnesse, when even the king felt, or half felt, that all that he had done, and all that he had tried, had been in vain; and men fought blindly with that horrible fog not only in the air but stealing chokingly into their very souls, and fell, too many of them, and, as they fell, "looked up to heaven, and only saw the mist."

And, age after age, God has to call to them not to allow themselves to be tamed and broken, not to grow acquiescent in things as they are, not to abandon their audacious hopes, but to keep daring and expectant. If the vision tarry, wait for it. Hold on a little longer, though your very souls are growing so numbed that they can hardly keep their grip. Wait, He keeps urging, wait!

That is a very common message to God's folk. And yet to wait can be the hardest thing in the whole world. "We can do nothing more," the doctor says, "we must just wait." But that is dreadful. If we could help in any way it would not be nearly so hard. But to sit still, with empty, useless, idle hands, while that dear life hangs in suspense, the thing

is maddening. Or, when an attack was ordered, much the worst time was those awful moments lined up in the trench, while the officer, his eyes upon his watch, waited for the appointed second, with one's every tense nerve strained and twittering, with one's mind running, on and on, with queerly quick, short, breathless steps, till one could have screamed: "Blow that whistle and let us get over, and be done with it, one way or the other. Better that than this long agony of waiting." Yet God often asks His folk to wait.

Not that they are to dawdle about until something turns up, or even to stand with their eyes fastened greedily on the horizon. If anything much is to happen for God in our time, then we must do it for Him, must throw in wholeheartedly all that we have into His service, must be eager and zealous over it. That is, indeed, where we too often fail; and why, not seldom, things move so exasperatingly slowly. We are listless, apathetic, only half in earnest. And then, with cool effrontery, we throw the blame on God. We can't understand, we say loftily, why One who is Almighty does not do far more for this desperate world. Why? answers God. Because you failed Me; because, at the pinch, the faith and courage and zeal on which I counted were not there.

But even if we are in deadly earnest, we must add something more to our equipment or inevitably we shall break down under the strain of things before the end; must be not only enthusiastic and on fire, but at the same time cool and patient; working as tirelessly as if this were the one and only time that what we see could ever come to pass, and yet not peevish and discouraged if there prove to be delay; doing our duty loyally, yet, with a quiet and unflurried mind, leaving the times and seasons to God's choosing. That last is not easy; and the more in earnest that we are the harder does it grow. Kingsley, quoting the Scripture, "He that believeth will not make haste," flamed out in his hot way: "And yet I think that he that believeth can do

nothing except haste ; look at the world ! " And, indeed, it is extraordinarily difficult not at times to lose patience with God, not to be filled with what Hilary of Poitiers called " an irreligious solicitude for Him," not to have the feeling that He is not managing well, and that surely He might do vastly more if only He would really try, not to keep running on ahead of Him like an excited child and back time after time to tug impatiently at His hand, seeking to hasten His slow steps, and always crying " Hurry, hurry," not to grow fussy and hot and out of breath, even to sulk, declaring with a whimper, like a petted bairn, that we won't play unless our hands are to haul down the enemies' flag, and our eyes are allowed to see the final wild exhilarating rush of victory, sweeping all before it !

But it is not that God is slow, or less in earnest than we are. Ah ! who of us can doubt Him now ? For who of us has gone the length of Calvary ? Shall we compare our futile little bits of earnestness with that ? It is that human nature is much more crabbed and stubborn than we with our superficial diagnoses realize, that evils have far deeper roots than we imagine, and won't come up, as we hope, with one sharp tug ; that the road to our ideals is much longer than it looks when we set out on it. Don't you remember Masefield ?

" Not for us are content, and quiet, and peace of mind,
For we go seeking a city that we shall never find.
Only the road, and the dawn, the sun, and the wind, and the rain,
And the watch fire under the stars, and sleep, and the road again.
We travel the dusty road, till the light of the day is dim,
And the sunset shows us spires, away on the world's rim."

Yes, says God, this may prove a longer and much slower business than you estimate. I have had gallant servants who gave Me their whole life, everything that they had, and yet they died in faith, not having received the promises, but with their faces still turned doggedly in their direction, and still certain they would come. And if you have been set

down in a difficult day, can you too give Me a like steadfastness, dare you too work on unafraid without much to encourage you, but still infecting those around you with your unconcerned and quiet faith, a faith that never dreams of doubting Me ?

> " Love, love that once for me did agonize
> Will conquer all things to itself. If late
> Or soon it be, I ask not, nor advise.
> But, since my God is waiting, I can wait."

Faith, hope, love, these are great gifts. And yet not faith, not hope, not love, not even all of them together, will of themselves bring you through with honour. For that, something even more is needed. Remember, says St. Anthony, of all the virtues, perseverance alone wins the crown. Have you the cold, dour courage that, checked and beaten back, can set its teeth, and hold its ground, and have never a thought of giving way ? For that is often what I need in those who would serve Me, says God. If it tarry, wait.

And so in our own lives. " We all thought," said Baxter, speaking of the Civil War, " that one battle would end it, but we were all very much mistaken." And so, I suppose, most of us expected that our spiritual life would move on, in some ways, much faster than it has. We knew we had certain temptations, but we were going to knock them on the head, and so an end of that ; and yet perhaps some of them visit us to this day with the old hateful cunning. We were aware that we were prone to this and that humbling sin and weakness. But Christ would break them for us. Yet, perhaps, some of them still stubbornly persist. We saw the glory of life as Christ led it, and our hearts ran out to that eagerly. But it has proved more difficult to weave our matted character into His likeness than we thought ! We, too, have need of that prayer that Paul tells us he kept urging on behalf of certain of his friends, that our " faith may become a thing of power." For, as things are, it seems sometimes curiously ineffective, does it not, in our particular

case ? Even a grain of it will remove mountains, we are promised ; and indeed we too, like Bunyan, have seen men tumbling about the hills with it, seen natures that seemed set rebuilt from their foundations upon a new plan, and men and women who had sunk very low transformed and glorified beyond belief. But our own records somehow seem far tamer and much duller. Ananda, Buddha's favourite disciple, saw comrade after comrade reach Nirvana. Yet, though he loved as few among them loved, year after year slipped past, and for him it seemed far away as ever, and the marvellous chance, for all his longing, in his case would not work out. And we, too, do have faith in Christ, and we, too, do look toward Him ; and yet, and yet, our faith is not the thing of power it manifestly is for many another. Yes, says God, sometimes it is very slow. But don't you throw away your hope, hold to it, wait.

And to teach you that hard lesson, look at Jesus Christ, who, though plans broke, and friends deserted Him, and God Himself seemed strangely callous to it all, held on unflinchingly and waited, though the crowds were plainly leaving Him, and a huge storm was obviously blowing up, and it did break on Him at last, and in the end they nailed Him to a cross ; waited even then, unafraid even there, for the vision that had tarried, ah ! how long, still certain it would come ! " The patience of Christ," says Paul, laying his hand on what most struck him in the Master, may God direct your fretful hearts to that. If you would face life bravely and big-heartedly, keep close to Him. For to a certainty you, too, will need to learn to wait if you would really serve God and the Cause, and not break down at times into a whimper of disloyalty, nor be guilty of an insolence so gross that it can seek to hector God, to instruct the All-Wise, and that, not without a certain peremptory sharpness at His dullness. Steady, there ! Steady ! Wait !

But further, there is here a promise that may well rally the most dispirited. " It will come," so God tells us ; you

can count upon that; "it will come." It is no futile fancy, no mere dream, maddeningly impossible, as when out in the trenches, sick of the mud and the shelling and the war, you sat and dreamed such vivid dreams of home, that for the moment you seemed there, among your own again. And with that some one spoke or jostled you, and it was gone, was far away as ever, and with a jolt you were back in the mud and the shelling and the war. Blessedly, it is not like that. "All we have hoped or dreamed of good," says our brave poet, "shall exist, not its semblance but itself. The hard that proved too hard, the heroic for earth too high," will all come true—will surely all come true. I promise it, says God. If you will play your part, you can depend on Me. It is upon the road, though you see nothing; the seed is living, and is springing up, and it will flower. Winter turns spring, and spring grows summer every year.

Is it not well to be reminded of that sometimes? For there is much in history to daunt, and not a little to make one cynical. Here are we, for example, all agog over the League of Nations. And yet experts, who presumably are cognizant of the facts, assure us that since the days of Henry VI. this is the twenty-sixth attempt to eliminate war by some kind of international agreement that has been started with high hopes! Twenty-five times others have seen the vision that we see; twenty-five times have they pursued it eagerly; and five-and-twenty times it dimmed, flickered, and went out. And now once more we are out on the old quest, that has for so long baffled so many others. Yes, say many, it is demonstrably useless, and a wild foolish chase of what is unattainable, that can only leave us hot and breathless, and ruffled in our tempers, and depressed.

But no, says the prophet, "it will come." The Reformation, too, before Luther's day, was broken more than twenty times. Again and again the flames were fiercely stamped out, quenched in blood. Yet it did come at last. Over

and over, the embers that seemed cold grew red again, until there dawned a day when the winds of God were abroad in the earth; and, almost suddenly, these fanned the uncertain flames into a roaring fire that rushed, free and untamable, across the world. No effort in the cause of truth is ever useless, even when, mathematically, the result appears to be exactly nothing, except withered hopes and wasted energies. Each new attempt revives the idea in men's minds, keeps it alive, sends some remembrance of it down the ages, hands on a high tradition. It is like those sham attacks out at the front, that seemed to end only in cruel ruin and inexplicable bungling with men's lives. I have spoken to a Divisional Commander, before whom as a rule one walked in fear and trembling, forgetful of all seemliness, and swept away by a hot anger. "Look at my boys," I cried, standing there among the ghastly wreckage, "look at my boys!" And the man answered, with tears in his eyes, "God knows, padre, I did not wish this. But, because of this, the enemy's line is broken miles away!" And all these efforts after some great truth or high ideal that were balked or driven back were not for nothing. Always we can be absolutely sure, even if we are disappointed, and our eyes see only tired men who have given much and gained nothing at all, that because of this somewhere down the coming years the enemy's line will break.

Indeed, history makes heartening reading. There were once horrible diseases rampant in our land, leprosy for one of them. It was not only Edinburgh that had its Liberton, its lepers' town: and many a country church still shows the old lepers' window, through which these poor outcasts won some share in that from which they were excluded. Everywhere, here and there, one came upon that horror, on maimed broken lives shut in to a huge, ugly, awful misery. And it is gone, gone utterly, like a hideous nightmare from which one awakes, and in a little while forgets about it. And moral evils that had seemed engrained in the make-up

of things have vanished no less thoroughly. For years, for centuries, leal hearts strained toward these achievements and they seemed no nearer; and yet they are here. "It will come," says the prophet; in God's name I promise it, if only we keep valiant.

True, at the best it is not easy to unravel the tangled web of things. The enemy rallies so surprisingly, and has such uncanny skill in snatching a new victory out of crushing defeat. I once lived in a little town which had in older days a most unenviable reputation for consumption. The doctors started a crusade; and, slowly, surely, at a gradually quickening pace, the thing died down; but, as it died, almost with equal steps cancer increased, and the last state appeared to be more evil than the first. And Morley gives a sombre reading of not a little of our confident activities. We see some evil, evolve a solution of it, push that through with long effort and sacrifice; and straightway the new situation may engender some new evil which may prove even more intractable and difficult to meet! We have won liberty, for instance, and what are we doing with that glorious thing, now it is ours? Filling the land with raucous cries, pushing and jostling one another in a wild selfish stampede, each after our class interest or personal gain! Aye, it is slow, and often disappointing! And yet would you have us serfs again? What can be done except give us our liberty, and let us learn to use it seemlily in time. Believe me, said the Romanist in Reformation days, if your mad scheme grows real, there can be nothing but disaster. For the people are not fit for the responsibilities and powers you are conceding them. Your churches will be empty, your Scriptures mishandled, your land filled with half-baked theories of half-ignorant minds; you need authority to guide and to control, and you are wantonly destroying it. Well, the churches *are* half empty, the Bible is not reverenced as once it was, and an amazing mass of confident nonsense is being talked with truculent assurance by people with small

right to an opinion, who do not even know how ignorant they are! There may be difficult times before us, granted, but would you have us back at the old subservience again? Surely a child must be set down upon its feet, if it is ever to learn to walk! That must cause many a stumble, may mean many a sore fall; but only so can it develop the powers it is meant to use. And though much may seem irritating, vexing, disappointing, still if we keep our faces toward the light, and push on as we can, it will come in the end. For it is not for nothing that the popular mode of thought sees an advance, a progress, a slow painful evolution in the trend of things. There may be, there is, many a slip back, and fall, and blunder. Still, "it does move." And "it will come."

In our time? That may be. But certainly if we are faithful, some time. And is it not enough for us to play our part, and let who may be destined for that reap the glory? Even Jesus Christ saw little. Once by a glorious feat of heroism the battalion saved the line. And three days later, as the tired boys lay about a barn, speaking with small voices almost inaudible through weariness, the papers came. By an inexplicable slip the credit of the feat was given to a battalion who were miles away, and ours was never mentioned. There fell a sombre silence, and the Colonel's face flushed red. And then his head went up. "Gentlemen," he said proudly, "what does it matter who gets the credit of it? We know we did it." Enough for us that we be faithful. It will come.

And in our own lives also. Perhaps you are depressed, dissatisfied with things, haunted by an uneasy feeling that after all your faith and efforts you are painfully little changed from your original uncouthness; that not enough is coming of it, that if the real Christ were really in your life surely there would be greatly more to show. Look, your heart cries, how it was in His time! How everywhere He went there were extraordinary happenings, things glorious, un-

deniable, and there for all to see. But I, what can I show ? Towards the end, Marcus Dods, whom Robertson Nicoll called the most Christlike man that he had ever seen, felt that about himself with gnawing acuteness, but used to fortify his heart with a chemical metaphor. Into a liquid is dropped one drop of a second, and there is no result : another, and another, many others, one by one, apparently in vain : and then one more, precisely like the rest, and of a sudden, not as the outcome of that last alone, but as the culmination of the whole seemingly useless process, everything is changed ! And day by day doggedly we pray, and hope, and toil, and believe. And what is there to show for it ? Not much, to outward seeming, it may be. And yet is far more going on than our eyes see ? And one day may one other prayer, one other ordinary act of common faith, one more looking toward Jesus Christ bring the long process to its culmination, and we waken satisfied, because in His likeness — at last ! Sudden or slow, dramatic or invisible, " it will come "—it will come ! After all, says Samuel Rutherford, the end is sure : a long, steep road, a tired footsore traveller, and a warm welcome home, that is the worst that there can be.

For, says the prophet, " it will not be late." That is the fear that often haunts us. It is too late, men say, of the old land. She has heeled so far over in the gale that she can't right herself—is doomed ! Such talk, one fancies, is the way to bring disaster on us. If only we will pay our taxes cheerfully, and face a more pinched way of life than we would naturally choose, and think, not only of our own, but other people's interests, please God, we will come through it yet.

But that " too late " is a grievous reality ; a grim and fearsome fact of life. The other day I was taking the service at a baby's funeral ; and, among others, read the passage, " There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, for the former things are passed away." And then I looked across at the mother, wondering if that was helping her, or

only wounding her poor heart? It is a bonnie promise! Ah, if only it had come in time! But in one sense, at least, its fulfilment is too late for her. Her boy is dead! And often that is what we feel about ourselves. Once, not a doubt, it might have been. We might have really closed with Christ, and really taken what He offers us. But now our character is fixed, our habits are settled, the channels cut in which the rivers must run to the end. It is too late. And there is dreadful truth in that. "Sleep on now," said the Master sadly, the glorious office He had offered His friends left unaccepted and refused; sleep on, it does not matter now. The chance is lost, the opportunity is past, sleep on! The boy who in the afternoon repented of his surliness and went, could only offer a few hours of work at most, not a full day. That had become impossible for ever. And every failure in a way is irremediable. Always our record must be to the end by that amount less than it might and should and could have been. The crooked can't be made straight; what is lacking can't be numbered. And you and I look wistfully across at Christ, and then sadly enough at what we are. That is what I might have been, and this is what I am: that is what I was offered, and this is what I chose! Fool that I was, but now—it is too late.

But the whole point of the Gospel is that, in one glorious way, it is not yet too late for any one. If you have not seen that in Christ, have you seen Christ at all? Always He faced the poorest, the most soiled and tangled life, with the sure confidence that even yet it could be righted; yes, and He would do it now. And how often and how strangely He was justified in cases that looked just impossible! Aye, and why should He not be so in you and me? It is to us, remember, to plain ordinary folk like you and me, that He gives His bewildering promises; it is on us He makes His staggering claims; it is for us He prays those astounding prayers of His with their tremendous hopes! To that, then, He feels even yet we can attain!

> "Death closes all: but something e'er the end,
> Some work of noble note, may yet be done.
> The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
> The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
> Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
> 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world."

No, it is not too late, even for you and me, to throw ourselves on Jesus Christ; really to take, really to use, that strange power that He offers, and so really grow—yes, you and I—into His blessed likeness: not too late for God's dream of us to come really true.

Up! up! and back into the thick of things with steady hearts and quiet eyes. And, even "if it tarry, wait for it, for it will come: and it will not be late."

XVII

THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE IN A TIME OF CHANGE

"And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain."—HEB. xii. 27.

THESE men, it seems, were puzzled and uneasy, and not without good reason. For much that was customary and familiar, that they had always taken for granted, that they had assumed was woven inextricably into the essential stuff of things, was passing and crumbling and going out before their staring and incredulous eyes. And they were left with the sick feeling of a man in some appalling earthquake, with the solid ground reeling and shuddering beneath him, and everything that had been fixed and stable and dependable opening up hideously into yawning cracks and chasms that gaped ever more fearsomely wider, falling in, vanishing clean away, till there seemed nothing left to which to cling or on which to maintain a last precarious foothold! All is lost! their hearts gasped out in terror. This is sheer ruin, and the end! No, answers this great writer calmly, this is God. That God who often marches upon His tremendous way to His vast far-off ends through change, upheaval, cataclysm, over the tumbling of huge billows crashing to their fall, and under lowering skies full of the roar of hurricanes bursting in ruinous fury, as it seems, upon a cowering world. These wild winds, catching away your breath and whirling wreckage everywhere, are God's

winds, shaking down what has grown old and obsolete and withering, that what is green and fresh and vigorous and living may have room to breathe and grow and blossom and bear a rich harvest.

That is a brave faith to hold in this chaotic-looking world where good seems often to be falling back and evil sweeping forward irresistibly. Yet there is plenty of evidence to substantiate it. This earth of ours, for instance, what bit of it but has been many things at different times, a part of some vast continent, a white-capped sea—now a lonely islet, now, it may be, a mountain-top heaved up toward the heavens, and now a glen sunk deep amid the towering hills. And every time that that which had been wrought out into being through such agelong infinite skill and toil was blotted out did the angels whisper together and say, It is all over, God has failed? The earth is gone? Not so. That seeming chaos was not madness nor defeat, but divine wisdom picking its sure steps to its determined ends. And now, as the result of all that welter of confusion, the earth lies fixed and cooled and stable, a fit stage for the thronging interests that crowd it, and for the glorious epic of humanity.

And us, too, God will not allow to settle down with any second best, however splendid; keeps breaking in on us, disturbing and upsetting us, much to our own chagrin. Each time that we drop anchor in some snug haven out of the wind, and straighten our stiff backs, and stretch ourselves luxuriously, meaning henceforth to take our ease, He calls to us imperatively, bidding us hoist sails at once and make for the wild tossing of the open seas again. And it is slowly and grudgingly we lift our anchors and very wistfully that we stare at the fading shores, yet we must go. We knock together a scheme of things we think will do, and propose to rest satisfied with that, and not bother ourselves about such matters any further; and He thrusts upon us some new fact that makes the whole thing, even to our prejudiced eyes, quite out of date and hopelessly inadequate,

and we perforce must start anew. We run up a mode of life that is well enough, we say, and He flashes before us a vision of what it might be that makes us flush and hurriedly bury out of sight that poor thing grown impossible now, and build again more boldly and on a far ampler plan. We know Christ as well as we want to do, have taken from Him as much as we wish, and God so orders things that one day we come on Him face to face ; and with that we must rise and follow Him into far lands we never thought to travel. Our ambition is to live a dull, tame, uneventful life, pottering to and fro at little nothings,

> "In a sleepy land, where under the same wheel
> The same old rut is deepened year by year."

But He won't let us be, keeps crying to us, "Up ! Up ! Rise, ye, and depart, for this is not your rest" ; is urgent and insistent with us ; brutally rough, we sometimes whimper, rubbing ruefully at the shoulder He has shaken till we opened drowsy eyes, and grumbled slowly to our heavy feet. At all events He won't take a refusal, but forces us to go ; and, if we try to tarry, there and then shakes down about our ears the comfortable resting-places where we meant to loll and take our ease.

And we don't like it ! You remember how Charles Lamb frankly confessed that he was quite satisfied with his portion, and did not wish to push on any further into life, wanted nothing except to settle down just where he was with a few friends just as they were, and that on and on for ever. And for some that is natural enough. For one thing, we are all the natives of a very small province of time. And the moment that we cross its borders into another generation, we find ourselves home-sick aliens in a strange land, the true accent of the thought of which we never really catch, but always speak it with a palpably foreign accent. And we look back regretfully to the old times, our times, in which we were at home, and when things ran our way, and people

thought as we think still; and our interpretations, so dusty and sun-bleached and out of fashion now and thought amusingly antique, were the accepted ones which every one believed. While now the whole earth has erratically swung away into another orbit, and revolves round strange new suns; and other stars look down on us; and surely God Himself in this mad flight is being left behind. That is a mood quite tragically ancient in this ever-changing world. "Alas, alas!" so runs one of the oldest inscriptions dug up in Babylonia, written, they say, six thousand years ago, for "the times now are not what the times used to be." And if you, too, are feeling that, if you are growing critical and censorious, if your lingering eyes will look back wistfully across your shoulder to what has been left behind, if you cannot but think that God is not to-day the God He used to be, that means that you are getting old, in mind at least, that your adventurous days are over, and you fain to settle by the fire, and all this in a world that rushes on; means you are growing tired, and losing touch with things; which is a pity. But what if it proves you are losing step with God!

We are dull and conventional creatures, and in God there are an unexpectedness and an originality that continually disturb and confuse us. For spiritually most of us are still at the level of the insects. Set us down in the familiar situation we have always known, and, guided by instincts built up on prolonged experience, we can manage well enough. But God keeps asking something new of us; and for that the old stereotyped response is futile. Is there not something dreadful in the fact that it was a people whose whole souls had been watching for the Messiah for centuries, who had bravely refused to give up hope, who held to it stubbornly that He would come, and spent their days with hearts alert and listening for the first sound that might be His footsteps, that it was they who did not recognize Christ when He came, brushed up against Him in the streets, and impatiently pushed past Him, without a second glance, laughed at His

claims, "That the Messiah! He is not in the least like Him," and, irritated by the sheer effrontery of so gross an impostor, slew Him as an evil man far better away; and, that done, turned to wait and hope and watch once more, not knowing, poor souls, that He they sought had come, and that His blood was on their hands and staining their blind souls. Let us beware lest what we too resent and shake off and dislike and try to hunt down in our day is—God.

Blake once had a vision of Voltaire, in which he heard the latter saying, "I blasphemed the Son of Man, and it shall be forgiven me: but my enemies blasphemed the Holy Ghost in me, and it shall not be forgiven them." God pity us! What if our boasted principles are no principles but mere ugly prejudice, and what we take to be our loyalty to Christ only a stubborn crabbedness of spirit that will not be taught even by Him! What if the things we would not have, because they were novel to us, and uncomfortably unaccustomed, and away from the line of thought in which we were brought up, meet us later at the Judgment Seat bearing the wounds we gave them, and the hate and insults that we spat into their faces; and standing there, so shamefully mishandled, look at us with Jesus' eyes! "Christ," says Tertullian, "is not the Convention, He is the Truth."

Well may Paul pray with passion to the allwise, pitying God that He give us the spirit of judgment and a discerning heart. For we are foolish blunderers at best, lost in the mists of things; and still truth finds itself in an inhospitable world, where few souls recognize it, and most doors open to its knock on grudging and complaining hinges, or remain obstinately shut. And yet, says this great writer, and there is almost terror in his eyes, "see to it that you do not refuse to listen to Him who is speaking to you." For that is God's voice that is shaking down what was never meant to be permanent; the customs, once immeasurably helpful, but now growing stale; the interpretations that once made things clear, but now hamper and hinder a new generation,

shaking them down, that the things that can't be shaken may remain, and the eternal facts, no longer obscured to them because now translated for them into their own language, may grip new minds and hold new souls and rule new lives.

That is a lesson always difficult to learn, and not least surely now when the gulf between the generations looked fully wider than is normal. Take it of our religious thinking. The old moulds have been shattered. Everything, even the most sacred, has been cast back into the crucible. And many older folk look round them in a kind of lost bewilderment. For all that is most dear to them seems to have no place in the world about them now. Well, you remember how, after the war, men coming home to an utterly changed world, felt puzzled and unhappy and a little frightened, till General Smuts steadied us with that fine rallying cry, "Humanity has struck its tents, and is once more upon the march!" And with that it came home to us that what was happening was not ruin but a thrilling adventure, that God was calling us, as He called Abraham, to leave home and go forth, not knowing where we went, but with the divine assurance that, if we dared to follow, He was leading us into a better country; and the divine warning, honestly given, that for a time we might feel strangers and foreigners and outcasts, and be tempted to look back wistfully to dear familiar things, even to lose heart and turn back; and the divine promise that, if we held on, He pledged Himself, as God is God, that our dream would come true, and our hope set into a glorious reality, or else, says this audacious writer, God could not look us in the eyes, and would to all eternity have to slink past the souls whom He had cheated and betrayed and fooled! And so it is here.

Is it? you say. And there is no assurance in your voice. For to your eyes there is such patent evidence of loss; and yet where is the gain? The Bible is discussed and teased and fingered. But is it read? Has it its old authority? Is it obeyed, as it was wont to be? The

axioms and postulates upon which we were taught to build our life are challenged, or are gone. And the new reading of things looks far further from the centre and from God. Has Nietzsche really carried out his boast, and "broken the old tables"? For people seem so superficial, and so pleasure-seeking, and so small!

But, when you think things out, is not what ails us really this, that the new generation are so unlike us? And are we so beautiful that that need greatly worry us? Have we made so conspicuous a success that we have any right to claim that we must be the permanent standard from henceforward? Is not our error this, as Newbolt says, that we in the Church will think of ourselves as a beleaguered garrison desperately holding the fort of truth, whereas we are really a caravan upon the trek deeper and deeper into a wide country we have little more than entered? Whatever be the faults of the new generation, much of our trouble has its rise in this, that, little although you may suspect it, you yourself are not serving a big enough Christ, and must learn to think by far more hugely of Him. "That I may know Him," muses Paul. "If only some day I may learn to know Him!" Whereat we turn and stare at him. "Know Him!" but you do know Him, better than any one ever did. Your thinking of Him is the mould into which our deepest thoughts of Him down to this day have had to run. And indeed it is quite true, as Harnack says, that always when the gospel sweeps the world, it is because men have found their way back to Paul's big way of seeing and of stating Christ. Yet the man himself feels that he hasn't begun to know Him. A star here and there I have glimpsed, he says. But oh! if these cloud-banks would roll aside, what would I not see! And do you dare to imagine that you know the whole of Christ; that any creed, however famous, sums Him up with adequacy; that any man, or any council of men, be they ever so wise and spiritual, have seen out to the last constellation in that wonderful sky? Do you take this marvellous

gift of God into your hand, what Paul found indescribable, unspeakable, breaking through language and through thought, and do you dream that you can turn it round and round and measure it with your puny standards, and look over it and under it and on all sides of it, and say, "You see this is the length of it, and that the breadth of it, and yes, that is all that there is in it, and there is nothing more to say or know"? If so, your Christ is not the real Christ, but one infinitely pettier. It takes all the saints, says Paul, yes, all the generations of the saints, to learn to know Him somewhat as He really is.

And amid much that is confusing some things are quite clear. This to begin, that God's most Holy Spirit has not fallen dumb these days, but is still teaching His Church, and leading it on into some other of the things it was promised us He would teach us. And this, that if the new generation seems to some of us to have lurched far away from the central fundamentals, that fact, if true, is almost certainly due, in great degree, to our own lopsidedness of outlook. They are trying to re-emphasize aspects of Christ that we had left in shadow, and, endeavouring so to do, have themselves gone too far to the other side of the road. And if we cry out irritably, "But any one must see that we are far nearer what really matters," let us remember Butler's sobering reminder that in any clashing of opinion we differ from the other just as much as he differs from us, look as crudely preposterous and as crassly unreasonable in his eyes as he does in our own. If they can't keep in step with both Christ and us, better a thousand times that they should leave us, and hold firmly to Him as they see Him. The kingdom of the Master is not being shaken down because our views fall like the leaves when they have withered, for the tree lives on and bursts into the freshness of another spring.

Or take it of the old customs and ways. Frankly, for my own part, I cling to them; cannot agree wholly with Browning's gallant optimism that "the first of the new

beats the last of the old." Not always, surely, and not of necessity. Novelty need not be progress: nor is to be old invariably to be obsolete. In God's year winters follow summers just as certainly as the spring, thank God, follows them. And in our human story there are flowings of the tide, when all things are a shimmering glory, and also just as surely ebbs when most unlovely mud-flats lie revealed. In any case, those in middle life are prejudiced. When they scoffed at the Victorians in his hearing, Mr. George Bernard Shaw made answer simply yet sufficiently, "The women I loved were Victorians," he said. That settled things for him. It was along the old neglected ways, little frequented, largely grass-grown now, that God has met us times innumerable: every turn of them has for us haunting memories that make them very dear.

And have we not a case? When there were family prayers in every household, twice a day the great things were brought back to the remembrance. While now what wonder if, in the rush of life, they are forgotten? When everybody came to church, God had at least a chance to reach us. And from that little clearing in our busy days there was some prospect we might see the stars, and feel God's cool winds upon our hot foreheads. And are we really likelier to come on Him in that never-settling dust whirl, where the cars are racing one another on the road, or in the idle tattle of the drawing-rooms? When the sacrament was taken seriously, when it came first, and other things were put aside—God could have no rivals—and we prepared for it with earnestness, it was a mighty rallying-point in life, as it can hardly be when folk drop in only if they can happen to fit it in, or if there is nothing more exciting on. "The first of the new beats the last of the old" sounds a right valiant saying only until we take to facing facts, and then it proves to be a rather foolish and pernicious lie.

But there is a fussy panickiness of spirit that is nothing more or less than a gross unbelief in God. Always such

timid and faint-hearted souls keep watching His Throne apprehensively, and always they keep starting up in terror, crying with quavering voices, "Look! look! it's shaking! it's tottering! it's down!" But it's not down, stands firm and fast as ever. / "If," said old John Newton, "you think you see the ark of the Lord falling, you can be quite sure that that is due to a swimming in your own head." / There is a valiant soul in the Old Testament who saw everything that mattered being swept away in a tremendous swirling inrush of evil. Well, well, he calmly told his heart, the God who sat above the flood of Noah sits above this too; and it won't sweep Him away! There are two dauntless spirits in the New Testament who saw their whole world round them blazing from end to end, and tumbling in with a hideous roar that seemed plainly the end of everything. Yet it never occurred to either of them to be afraid. They knew God far too well for that. The real things, they know, can't be shaken: and those that are passing, dear though they are to them, they watch vanish without a fear. For they so vanishing are making way through this grim interlude of horror and unrest for something better still.

That is the spirit that becomes a Christian man. Do you imagine it was easy for the Master to believe? On His way to His Cross might not His heart have argued, and have had all the seeming evidence to back it, that God was plainly beaten, that evil had triumphed, that His own valorous scheme had ended in the starless midnight of an irretrievable disaster? And such thoughts did come knocking at His soul. Yet even then, and even there, He trusted God, the God who had so obviously failed Him, as it seemed. "It is all dark to Me," He said; "but God is over all, and He has not forgotten Me; and since this is His will for Me, since He allows this to happen, then through this somehow I shall save the world, through this that seems the end of all things, and the mockery of My faith." And it was because, so tested, He still trusted that Christ saved the world.

And it is not enough for us to celebrate that faith of His, and speak of it in wondering admiration. We, too, in our own little measure have to catch it, and to reproduce it, and to live it out when for us also things are dark and difficult; where for us, too, God's ways are hard to understand. We too must trust Him absolutely, in the utter dark. And one way of so doing is to watch the old, the dear, the sacred passing, and be unafraid. "It is not only," says Croce, "with souls that are dear to us, but with institutions that we love, that we must be prepared to say, 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.'" And we must say it bravely, ungrudgingly, cheerfully.

Or take it of life's changes, of that essential lonesomeness that ever haunts it. We strike our roots firmly and deep, and then we are torn up again. Dear ones are given us and grow more to us than ourselves, and then they are taken away and we walk in an echoing emptiness that does not fill as the years pass. And though the wound is clean—cannot we look God in the eyes and tell Him truly that we do not grudge them their glory, are not mean enough for that?—it does not heal, but still throbs cruelly. We settle down for life, as we imagine, and suddenly in the solid walls that surround us a door opens where quite certainly there was no door, and Some One thrusts us through; and when we turn the door is closed and fast behind us, and the old life is over, and we have to start afresh. We may hang back, but there is no resisting; we may clutch desperately at the familiar, but it fades from us, is not there any longer, and our hands close only upon empty air! Between us and the life we know there has appeared that little ribbon of water that grows and grows inexorably. And there is no getting back among those memories that beckon to us, call to us, hold our heart. For the gangway is down, and we are moving further and further out into a new life from which we half shrink because they have no place in it.

But, says this writer, thank God there are things that do not pass. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day and for ever." Wherever you may be, there He is too, the Christ who has never failed you, and who never will. I love the way he introduces that great phrase. Apparently these people were a bit discouraged. Their great leaders were dead, and they seemed to have stumbled on a smaller day when men looked pettier and life was duller than it used to be. And cunningly he turns that very lonesomeness of heart, that sour moroseness soaking into their spirits, into a challenge that must shame and hearten them. Well, he cries, think of these leaders of yours, of your own dead, and what came of it all for them! How did the battle end in their case? And Jesus Christ is the same still, will be for you, you yourselves being witnesses, all that He was for them. If their faith is your faith, if their hope is your hope, then one day, for you too, the victory must come. Have they not proved that to you—your own dead! And can you doubt, you who have your own private evidence that cannot be disproved, you who have lived with those who are now saints in light, you who have watched Christ's grace fulfilling in them all it promises. "Let us go forward over the graves of our dead," cries Goethe. Aye, well we may! They are not dead: their voices singing in their triumph yonder carry plainly to our ears; often our heart can see them, crowned and glorified before their Lord and ours. Though we must leave the place crowded with memories of them, they are not far from us, wherever we may be.

And One is nearer still. "Lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the end." Whatever else is taken, He remains.

> "One Friend by my path shall be
> To preserve my steps from wrong,
> Watching through the darkness long,
> Doing most with none to see."

Always there will be two of us. And who can be lonely, or dissatisfied, or afraid with Jesus Christ?

XVIII

THE LAST LINE OF DEFENCE

"However, the Lord is faithful; He will be sure to strengthen you and protect you."—2 THESS. iii. 3 (Moffatt).

"He is faithful that promised."—HEB. x. 23.

"Faithful is He that calleth you; He will do it."—1 THESS. v. 24.

"A Faithful Creator."—1 PET. iv. 19.

ALWAYS that is the final argument in Scripture, the last line of defence on which these men fall back when the darkness falls on life, and things grow tangled and bewildering. You can rely on God, so they assert with utter confidence. Yes; even when it seems He has forgotten, or grown callous; that He doesn't care or can't be bothered doing for us what would cost Him little effort and no sacrifice at all, and yet would make so huge a difference to us. Even then you can quite safely start from this—that He is entirely dependable, that what He says He means; that what He means He does; that what He does, however dark and sore it be, does not clash with His essential nature, no, not even that at which you look doubtfully, not seeing how a thing so cruel is to be covered by any kind of reading of the word "Love." That also, they say, will explain itself in time; and meanwhile we can trust Him with an absolutely quiet mind, to give us, not perhaps what we ourselves would like, but what is best for us; and since that came, that too is best.

These are trite platitudes, you interrupt impatiently, worn thin with long passing from hand to hand. Perhaps! Yet

none the less they are far and away the boldest and the most remarkable discoveries of human genius, and the part of knowledge that means infinitely more to us than all the rest of it thrown into one colossal heap. And, further, face to face with this confusing life of ours, is it always easy to believe it even yet? And do we so do in cold fact when our own life grows shivery and the night falls?

The honest Scriptures at least show us desperate souls who in some moods are fairly staggered, and across whose minds there blows at times a dreadful doubt that, like an icy wind, blots out the glory of the spring and leaves only a frosted blackness; who tell us bluntly that there come bleak moments when they more than half conclude the faith has fallen to pieces in their hands, that they have proved that there is nothing in it after all.

Jeremiah, for example, that affectionate sensitive soul, looks at God at times in a sheer bewilderment that can make nothing of His ways with him. He had trusted Him so utterly, had believed so certainly that he could count on Him, yet now and then he felt that God had fooled him, poor dupe that he was, that the promises against which he had leaned so confidently had given with a crash beneath him, and that he was falling down and down into a sheer and sickening horror of blank emptiness. Hot and tired and dusty in his very soul, he had held on bravely, telling himself that he knew where there was a spring of living waters, at which he could refresh himself, waters that never fail. Yet when stumbling somehow through the fierce glare he at last, spent and exhausted, came on the place, it was to find that his oasis had been only a mirage! Or worse than that, that its palm trees were dead, and its greeneries burnt brown and withered, and that in the river-bed there was no pleasant babble of running water plashing on its cool way ready for hot hands and for parched lips, but only a grim silence, and bleached stones hotter if anything even than the sun-baked sand around them.

Shuddering in his very soul, the man felt for one awful moment God had failed him, that the faith was but a fairy-tale, and that he had grown up and found it out; that there was no reality in it, nothing to help, nothing to grip and hold, nothing to meet his case and bring him through.

That was, of course, only the passing mood of a heart peevish from utter tiredness; and in a moment, hot-faced and much ashamed, he had flung it from him and had leapt up to his feet to face the worst, loyal of soul and sure of God as ever.

Yet what if that appalling nightmare of his had been true, if there were nothing solid in the promises but only thin dream stuff that melts at a touch, if Richter's ghastly vision were plain fact, when he saw Jesus returning to earth to tell us with a faltering voice and the tears running down His cheeks that He had made a terrible mistake, and that conscience compelled Him to come back and own that He had been quite wrong; that, though He had searched for Him eagerly and desperately, far and wide through the endless eternities, there is no Father, and no kindly care about us, and no wise mind planning upon our behalf as He Himself had fondly hoped and thought; that we must somehow make shift for ourselves as best we can, for there is no one who can help us. "Even so," cried Dostoieffsky, audacious in his extremity, "even if you proved to me that Christ is nothing but a myth, I would still cling to Him, and still believe in Him, because it is too beautiful to let it die, and I cannot manage without Him." That one can understand. Yet truth is truth, and must be followed, even if it did lead us into dry waste places whose interminable flatness has never a rise in it to make us lift our eyes, whose sluggish rivers have no sparkle of glittering sunlight on their sullen pools, no leap and adventure in them, no laughter, and no song in their dead souls—a weary land indeed.

But, blessed be God's name, our way does not lie there. For the doubts that spring out on us, and stab at our hearts, are not the truth. That has been proved in countless lives like

ours—been proved. And if we belaud the discoverers of mere mechanical inventions that save us a poor hour or two upon a journey, or add a little to our animal comfort, what do we not owe to the men who found God for us, who have tested and tried Him in every conceivable circumstance of life, and who tell us, as they have every right to do, that we can count on Him, that He will never fail us, that these wonderful promises are not mere words ; but that these things do actually happen, and these helps do really come even to ordinary folk like us ; that even the best that has been said of God is only a dim shadow of what any one can find in Him for himself : that, in short, all this glorious thing is true, and true for you and me. " He is faithful that promised," and you can rely on Him. " He will do it," that He said to you, is certain to stand to every letter of it, let your need be what it may. " He will be sure to help you " and to see you through.

At the same time there is this to add. That shrewd person, Samuel Butler, remarks about a certain person's unsolicited statement that he is not afraid of life, that that bold declaration is in itself a sure proof that he is. No one would dream of saying such a thing, he thinks, unless he were whistling to keep up his courage, or at least setting his foot firmly on a terror lurking in the shadows of his heart. And there is something in that view. And in the same way the fact that the Testament keeps assuring us so often that God is faithful, that He will never dream of going back upon His word, that we can build on everything He ever said as something fixed and settled, makes it clear that in those days many hearts must have been stunned and dispirited and beginning to look back across their shoulders, that many people's too friable faith must have been crumbling under the pressure of life. And if you, too, are finding things so difficult that faith is not an easy thing for you, then perhaps in that fact you may find a hope and comforting sense of comradeship.

Newman says boldly, that when the Scriptures show us the saints in their victories and triumphs he feels sadly left behind; but that, oddly enough as it might seem, when there is revealed some slip upon their part, his courage comes again at this demonstration that it was hearts frail and blundering as his own that, through God's grace, won to that glory. For, so he argued, if He did all that for men like me, then why not for me too? And, indeed, when in the Revelation we are pointed proudly to the happy souls who have attained, in whom it has worked out, who have inherited the fullness of the promises, it is well to turn back to the Epistles, and see from what very ordinary human stuff Christ's hands fashion that radiancy. You are not the only one who has found faith difficult, who has kept gazing with puzzled eyes from something that has stumbled you to God, and back again to this brutal-looking fact you cannot fit into any manner of unison with what you have been told of Him. Their hearts, too, were at times scared like your own. Yet all these panting, scurrying, frightened things were shepherded and coaxed into the fold at last. And so, please God, will you be too. For we have a good Shepherd, amazing in His skill and of a patience unbelievable, who gives His whole life for the sheep. And you can count upon Him absolutely.

Sometimes it is to help them through the difficulties of their common days that there is given to hard-pressed folk this comfortable assurance of God's presence and helpfulness. And how many there are that need it. In Morley's *Life of Gladstone* there is an eerie chapter on the round-room at Hawarden in which there was stored much of the huge and varied correspondence of that long and crowded life. And as we watch the biographer at work among the endless papers, surely the fire must have gone out, for how cold it has become! Looking up quickly, we cry, Has the sun set already? No! And yet what chilly shadows have crept cold and shuddery over our hearts! For in the main

it is a moving and pathetic record of brave hopes that died, and gallant dreams that came to little, and huge ambitions that went out, and men who ran well until something hindered them. There are triumphs and successes too, no doubt, but how much disappointment, heartache, sorrow! And so it is in the Apostle's correspondence, too. No one, he says himself, had any kind of difficulty but his first thought was to write to him. And as we read over his shoulder as he pens his answers, with their letters lying open there before him, again how much trouble and pain is in it all! And that is typical of all mankind.

There was a famous Scottish preacher once who near his end cried out that he would like to preach just one time more. What would you choose to speak about? they asked. And, without hesitation, he replied, "Upon the enormous difficulty of salvation"! That was apparently the main and last impression left upon his mind by life, that as he neared the city's gates far and away the most of those who had started with him on pilgrimage had been thinned out, and left behind, and were not there. But, for my part, not many things in life as I have seen it have made so deep an impression upon me as the amazing courage of my fellows. Always there is so huge a mass of sorrow in the world! And yet we can forget about it, never notice it, nor know that it is there. And why? Because those carrying it are so gallant-hearted, set their teeth, and clench their hands, and make never a whimper, bear it in a splendid, uncomplaining silence. None the less every gathering of men and women in God's house is a porch of Bethesda. Some are there, never a doubt, merely as casual visitors, strolling through without much definite object. But others are at the end of their strength, ailing in mind and sick in soul, and only God knows how tired in heart and body, just holding on, not seeing how another week or day can be put through, and desperate to find God, as their one hope. They must, if they are to have any further chance at all.

Not often have I been more moved than once, acting as Moderator in a vacant congregation, when the report of a deputation who had been hearing a minister with a view to a call was given in by a prominent lawyer in that city. No man could well have been more shy and embarrassed and afraid that he must be misunderstood. For it appeared that, while waiting in the church for the service to begin, he had felt himself challenged by Christ Himself. "So you are here to choose a minister," He seemed to say; "and on what grounds do you presume to set up as a judge? Have you yourself been so peculiarly effective in your Christianity?" Hearing which, I for one leant forward, feeling that this was a man whose opinion counted. And when it came it was to this effect, that the service was entirely worthy, and the sermon quite masterly, and the minister's personality unusually attractive; and yet, he added, our report is we should go no further. "The fact is," he said, "I for one am set down among earthy and material and sometimes rather squalid things; these make my life; and the church services are my one chance. Unless I see God there, I shall forget about Him altogether, shall lose sight of Him, amid the din and dust and press of life. And while this preacher taught me, interested me, even fascinated me, while he was preaching I had given me none of that needed sense of God." And I listened, thrilled and heartened, feeling preaching is indeed worth while if there is even one such soul in every church.

And they are always there. They must find God. To some there has come sorrow. Every morning they start out of their uneasy snatch of sleep to feel the old pain stabbing at their hearts and the appalling loneliness crushing in on them, like a flood. The other week I was speaking to a man, the first acuteness of whose agony lies more than twenty years away. Yet as he spoke of it his face went grey with the pain of it still. "It was

the mornings," he said almost to himself, "the terrible mornings; when one cried out, Not yet! O God! not yet! Have I another whole long day of it to face so soon!" And there are always such hurt creatures seeking for something to bring them through. And others have not gained from life what it seemed to promise them. The business is not prospering these difficult days; or their health is failing somewhat, and work not now the daily interest it used to be, but rather a heaviness to be shoved through by a tired mind that can only with increasing difficulty last the pace of things: perhaps the family is vexing them, or at least it belongs to another generation than their own, and may let them see it finds them dull and stupid and old-fashioned and irritatingly impossible in their outlook and ways, so that even at home they feel lonely and out of things and left behind, or——! The fiction of to-day is a terrible picture of life without religion, of boredom and a kind of despair driving unsatisfied hearts into all manner of extravagances, feverishly seeking something that will fill the days and help them to forget, and keep them from thinking. But the wiser turn to God. "He will be sure to help you," declares Paul; "just how, I cannot tell, for there is an amazing ingenuity about His grace; but I am sure He will. So often I myself have been at my wits' end," he says, "and He managed for me; have found myself confronting a dead wall of rock that nobody could scale, and the path, twisting, opened out into a large and roomy place where the going was quite easy; have learned that when we are beaten He is not baffled, but takes things into His own hands. He will be sure to help you." And indeed He does. Look back and you will see. "Yet I am not alone," said Christ, when all looked over, still calm and unafraid, "for the Father is with Me." And always Some One to whom it mattered, who remembered and who helped, has been beside you too! "I can do all things through Christ," cries Paul; and you yourself have done not a few

that looked impossible. For the helps of religion are very real and very solid, and they work.

Napoleon had a curious habit when he was in a difficulty of deliberately deceiving his own mind. He would add up his troops, purposely making the total bigger than it really was; he would speak of what divisions were to do which he knew to be non-existent; and if they challenged him about it, "Would you rob me of my peace of mind?" he would reply. And many seem to imagine that we religious folk are deceiving ourselves in that childish and unstable fashion. We add up God upon our side. But, of course, He isn't really there, and will do nothing; that must be ruled out. We speak of the help of prayer and such-like things. "Just sheer imagination," people smile, "a positively sinister and weakly thing that looks for aid where no aid can be, and prevents one developing his own resources and standing upon his own feet."

Ah, well! In Mr. Wells's story a man tumbles down sheer mountain walls into the unknown kingdom of the blind; and, far from accepting his tale of his gift of sight, they found it on the face of things incredible and impudent lying, and, when convinced there might be something in it, pitied the poor soul from their hearts and were preparing to have an operation to reduce him to their own kindlier state of blindness, and so save him from his foolishness of stumbling in the dark and his amazing unhandiness except in the day, when all wise people sleep. We know all that sight adds to us, because we see; aye, and all that God does for us, because we have experience of it also day by day. And we can count on it. "He will be sure to help you." Do you not feel His hand closing on yours? And with Him there beside you, cannot you face anything? I promise you, says Paul, He will not fail you. He will find a way; He will manage somehow for you. With utter confidence you can depend on that. For what He promises He does.

But, as a rule, when this assurance is given in the Testament it is to people who are discouraged about their spiritual life. For so much less seems to be happening than they had expected; habits they have long resisted still master them, perhaps with a disheartening ease; God's grace looks curiously ineffective, in their case at least. We have made huge and solid sacrifices, muttered these Hebrews, and what better are we for them? Ah, don't say that again! they cried in many of the churches; we are so sick of being told that this and that is bound to come. For nothing ever really does come, and year after year things drag on what they always were. To which Paul answers, If God called you (and you know He did) then He will stand to every word He ever said, and it will all come true. Would you deny what you had promised, or refuse to implement what you had signed with your own hand? No more will He. But "if He called you, He will do it."

No doubt, if you tire of the struggle and turn back, if you shrug your shoulders and say, "Ah, well, there are other things in life than fellowship with Christ," and slip aside to them, renouncing the quest, you may still rob yourself of what He is ready to heap upon you. But if you hold to it, as certainly as God is God it will come true. For, as Paul puts it confidently, speaking of the Jewish people who had slighted Him, and of God's faithful kindness towards them still, "He never goes back on His promises and gifts"—no, never. And this very rejection of them is only the opening of yet another door into His grace. So Paul is sure. If He called you He will do it; if He summoned you to fellowship with Christ He was not fooling you, nor yet inciting you to chase a mere will-o'-the-wisp that nobody can grasp; but one day you will bear Christ's image, and be with Him where He is. "Thy word is truth," said Christ Himself; as if to say, I have relied on Thy promises even where they looked impossible; I have tested and proved Thee as no other ever did; I have pushed

faith in Thee far further out than any other ever dared; and I can testify that every syllable of it works out.

"What is truth?" asked Pilate, for his part desperate of ever finding anything on which he could really rely, in that terrible mood of Anatole France, who gave as his last testament this verdict, that we men can never know, because, for one thing, we possess no language to express real knowledge. Such as we do have is derived from mere animal cries, and well enough to denote pain and lusts and hunger. But truth! What is truth? We can never know. Yes, says Christ with confidence, you can. For every word God ever said to you, and every hope He ever gave to you, and every vision He has flashed before you, that is truth; and you can count on it. It is the loveliest that is the truest; it is the best that is most real.

But I have failed, you cry; failed utterly and abjectly! Then, says the Apostle, "God is faithful and just to forgive." As if to say, here is no place for pure grace any further, but rather, in view of God's pledges to us, of common honesty, of simple justice, of standing to His veracity, as every decent man would do. He said that He would do it, and He must and will. But, you stammer, looking round your prosaic character and then up at the glories of the promises, He said (since you make much of that) He said He would make all things new for me! And yet how horribly familiar it all is—the old accustomed ways, the meannesses I hate yet can't shake off, the drabness I have always known. Well, cries Christ, boldly flinging down a daring challenge, let us test this thing, once and for all. Write in a book all I have ever promised you: set it down in a permanent record, every hope I ever sent to you, the biggest, the bravest, the most impossible. Set you it down, omitting nothing. And at the end of things we shall look back and see, you yourself being judge, whether in any one thing I over-estimated what I can do for you, or promised what I have not carried out, or pitched My hopes for you higher

than you can climb. Put it all down. For I am willing to take you as a test case.

Some of us perhaps need that assurance. Long ago you met Jesus Christ, you heard a voice that called and called, and, hearing, you rose up and went to Him. And with that, infinite possibilities seemed opening out before your feet. And yet how little, after all, there seems to be to show! What you had meant to do has not worked out, sometimes, you are inclined to think, because it was impossible.

> "The hope I dreamed of was a dream,
> Was but a dream, and now I wake,
> Exceeding comfortless, and worn, and old,
> For a dream's sake,"

a dream that has gone out, as it was bound to do.

That is unfair to God. For more is happening than you know, far more. Each year you return to your holiday quarters, and it is all unchanged to the casual glance. Yet really nothing is the same as what you left the time before. The rocks upon the hills have been weathered more deeply by another winter's frosts and ice; always the burns are tearing down the solid mountains, set and immovable though they seem; month after month these dwindle; and away beneath the sea new continents are slowly being formed out of their silt, upon which there will flourish empires and civilizations when the world we know has vanished into nothingness. And in these characters of ours, too, there is much more going on than we can see. But even God needs time. "Let there be light," He said. And did the archangels, peering out æons later into the unchanged darkness, whisper, "For once He has failed"? If so, the more fools they; for in the end it came. Or when He cried, "Let us make man in our own image," for long enough there was nothing to see but lowly ape-like creatures: yet at long last something higher did appear — God's daring dreams really worked out. To fashion Christ's image out of you and me is not an easy

thing even for God. Yet to that impossible task He has given Himself, with that set look upon His face, and with that almost frightening patience of His that will never break ; and one day it will all come true—that too. What He has promised He will do.

To which perhaps you answer fretfully, Why talk in silly metaphors like that ? God has not really spoken : no voice has come to me. But I myself have dared to dream huge and tremendous dreams that won't work into fact ; and if I choose to father what have proved to be these foolish hopes of mine on God, that does not make Him really responsible for them. But isn't that a rather childish argument ? Like Paul, or for that matter Tennyson, Jeremiah heard two voices disputing in his soul. The one, inciting him to a life of service and sacrifice he called God, because he knew only too well these inclinations were not natural to him, must have come to him, so he felt, from some Source higher than himself. But the other, fearfully dragging him back, he recognized with shame as his real me, with all his characteristic ways.

In your life, too, there is a noisy clash. For there are longings, wonderful in their beauty ; and very unimpressive actualities. And are you going to argue the other way round, to claim that this poor reality, as it lies there soiled and torn, is the best that God could dream out of your possibilities, and that the splendid hopes and yearnings that so utterly out-top that are your very own ? Why, then, you are greater, you the creature, than the God that fashioned you. No, God does speak : and every dream that haunts, and every vision that shames, and every hope that will not let you rest the poor thing that you are—that is His voice. And what He says He does, and what He promises comes true. And you yourself are a new proof of it. He called you into fellowship with Christ. Yes, you say sullenly—and look at me. And who was Christ ? He was the gallantest of hearts, One who believed with nothing to encourage Him, who

trusted in the utter dark, who died upon the cross still sure of God and of the wisdom of His plans for Him. And if your soul has little to encourage it, and the way is hard and rough, and faith not easy, don't you see that He is giving you your chance of putting on Christ's likeness, of believing with something of His daring, His big-heartedness, His gallantry : is, in short, keeping His word to you to the very letter, and far more ? Did He call you ? asks Paul. Then the thing is settled. He will do it, and is doing it now.

But most impressive of all, to my mind, is that passage in which Peter in his final way applies this reasoning to the mysteries of life—the pain, the suffering, the sorrow that so haunt and baffle us. These things are here, dreadfully real. And it will not do to push them hurriedly aside, with a cheap and shallow optimism that tries to defend God too easily. The whole point of the Book of Job is that it is such people, themselves safe and untouched by the shadows, and uttering maddening platitudes that merely fret a sore heart raw, who are impatiently thrust aside by God ; and a soul, frenzied and bewildered and half blasphemous through agony, who is commended, on the ground that he at least was trying to feel his way to something honest and sincere, that really faced the bitter facts.

And yet, think how we may, and struggle as we can, will we ever get further here than that profound saying of Peter, "Let those who suffer in accordance with the will of God commit their souls to a faithful Creator ?" What more is there to add ? What better can we do ? Surely we can assume that it was not in mockery He formed us, but that He had a plan ; that He has not forgotten it nor tired of us, but that He stands to it, and is working it out ; is, in short, "a faithful Creator." To that we have to come at last. Our dear ones die. And then, what then ? The glory of the sunset fades for ever ; the splendour of the flower falls and has vanished, not to return ever again. And has this too gone out, this being we so loved ? Of course, say some. "The

President of the Immortals had finished his sport with Tess." But we think otherwise, thank God, and lower them down into the sullen grave with steady hands, committing them to "a faithful Creator," who did not surely fashion them only to blot them out again, but made them for some high and glorious end, to which, being now ready for it, they have passed. And in His loving hands we know that they are safe. When bedtime came for Mr. Canton's little lass, when the dark fell, and all the toys and playthings, all that she most loved, had to be put away,

> "She does not sob in sorrow,
> Oh, father, do not break or injure these!
> She knows that I shall fondly lay them by
> For happiness to-morrow,
> So leaves them trustfully,
> And shall not I?"

For happiness to-morrow!

Or we bring back to God our broken hopes and faded dreams and wasted opportunities. And in what can we hope but in His faithfulness? "Forsake not the work of Thine own hands," urges a psalmist. And indeed that is a reasonable plea, a prayer that surely we dare urge. He made us for some deep and divine end. And, having made us, He will not cast us away, like a tool that has broken in His hand, a possibility that has gone out, a dream that might have been, but can't be any more. Surely He will not start to build a tower, and then leave it unfinished, as an eternal symbol of His failure or His fickleness. But all He willed for us, that one day we shall be.

Or, here is this great heedless earth, such multitudes of souls, careless, indifferent, stubbornly refusing to be won, do what God may. And how is it to end? How can we tell? But this we know, that He created every one of them. And would His honour be unsmirched, and could His mind be satisfied, if even one of these He made has "to be cast as rubbish to the void"? At the last must His heart be content,

with at best only partial victory? Or, faithfully working out His dreams and hopes, shall He yet see a world, clean and unsullied, as He planned it at the first, and evil left no foothold in it anywhere, and His will being done on earth as it is done in heaven?

"God is faithful, He will be sure to help you."

However our hearts fail us elsewhere, when they beat us back to this our last line of defence, always they rally, turn, are ready to face anything. For with a God that we can trust, what can there be in life that need make us afraid? And when we come to die, if He be there,—

"Thou'st seen how closely, Abba, when at rest,
My child's head nestles to my breast;
And how my arm her little form enfolds,
Lest in the darkness she should feel alone;
And how she holds
My hand, my hands, my two hands in her own?
A little easeful sighing
And restful turning round,
And I too, on Thy love relying,
Shall slumber sound."

XIX

THE MESSAGE OF THE BLESSED DEAD

"Ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect."—HEB. xii. 22, 23.

NO single mind can exhaust Jesus Christ; can map out with thoroughness that bewildering firmament to its last far constellation; can experience out to the end all that there is in Him for us, and see only a blank beyond.

The most that you or I know or can know of Christ, wonderful though it be, the big thing in our life, as central as the sun, is but "a little lot" of stars out of a dazzling multitude, a very tiny patch out of an infinite sky. It takes all the saints, says the Apostle, pooling their experiences, and each of them reporting what he has observed from his particular angle, to piece together, not a final nor an adequate, not even a seemly, but a fairly reasonable working view of what Christ is and can do for us. And we had better remember that. For we can easily become pettily parochial in our Christianity, can let our faith doze its drowsy days away in a sleepy hollow out of the hum and stir and large events of a really Christian life, in a dull little place where nothing ever happens, and stupid trivialities cause a buzz of excitement and are talked about for days. We can grow prematurely satisfied with mere beginnings; can become one-sided and even false in our conceptions by heavily underlining this, while overlooking that, as really there in Christ, though we leave it unused. Constantly we must be at pains to make

quite sure that the Christ we know is the authentic Master, carefully correcting our portrait of Him " by the living face ; man's God by God's God in the mind of man." And one way so to do is, cultivating a catholic heart to look towards our fellows, hopefully expecting to learn from them not a little that they have discovered and that we ourselves have missed.

Well, here is an eager soul who bursts in to tell us what he has found in Christianity, something of the enormous difference that it has made for him. His breathless tale is not of course a full, actuarial statement ; is not cold statistics at all. Yet it is not tumbled out haphazard. And nobody can fail to see that among the things he finds immeasurably helpful is the sense that he is one of a great company.

These early Christians were a pitiful handful. If you had wished to come on them, you would have been wise to search in some back street. And there, in a shabby little meeting-place, you would have found a few plain, unimpressive-looking people, who had slipped through the darkness from their menial duties, thinly scattered here and there over the benches. Paul once looked round on such a typical gathering with an amused smile. We are an odd company, we people of God, he said. " Not many wise, not many noble, not many mighty are called." And who am I to speak, I with my unimpressive personality and stammering tongue ! And these Hebrews felt all that. At times they caught their hearts looking back wistfully to the dear ways of the synagogues : often they missed the splendour of the temple ceremonial, the mass of the worshippers, the thrill of the crowd. Shamefacedly, yet very really, they felt that their own services were surely just a little drab and beggarly and uninspiring. And this man keeps telling himself and them that they are not a meagre handful, but lost and drowned and carried along in a huge crowd of happy beings, all streaming the one way. Unwearyingly he heaps up words and paints new metaphors to bring that home to them. We have come to a city with its large, full life, and an unending

bustle always thronging past along its busy streets ; to an innumerable company of angels, uncountable forces throwing in all they have and are upon our side ;—for, as Dean Inge says, " the universe is friendly to brave men who can endure hardness " ;—lives beyond reckoning, real lives, and each of them all that we dream and hope and long for worked out and being lived from day to day ; to the general assembly of the saints—and look ! how through the open doors others keep pouring in even as we are watching ; to the spirits of just men made perfect ; and, thank God, how many of them there are !

For it isn't only a few frightened, scurrying creatures, torn and panting and half dead, that the good Shepherd manages to save and herd into the fold, but a great flock, the whole of it, none missing. If you are growing timid or despondent, look round at all your comrades in the faith, and take fresh heart, like a straggler lost in the enemy's country, seeing, poor scared soul, a lurking foe in every bush, hearing a terror very near in every sound, who blunders upon the main body of the troops, and, back in the ranks, with his comrades laughing and singing round him, forgets his fears, is his own man again, and resolute like all the others.

That is a very human mood. Every one who was at the Front remembers how much easier it was to do a difficult thing along with others than when quite alone ; and how under shell fire one was apt unconsciously to edge a little nearer to his fellow, finding a certain crazy comfort in the contiguity of another body frail as one's own. And certainly Carlyle is wholly right when he declares that our own conviction is immensely strengthened the moment that we have persuaded some one else, or even chanced upon another who shares our belief. It is all very well for an intellectual aristocrat like Mr. Aldous Huxley to declare a little loftily that he is most religious when he is alone, that, for his part, he rather dislikes the animal heat and pressure of his fellows pushing about him, and suspects the emotions wakened in him in a crowd. All that one understands.

Not often do I get as near to God as in the hush among the hills ; no incense brings the unseen so vividly before my mind as the scent of the heather or a broom bank in hot sunshine, nor does any music move my very soul like that of brown burn water whimpering and laughing as it leaps into foam and whiteness.

And yet is it not a wonderful thing to belong to the Church of Christ ? to know that we are not each of us a solitary soul out on a lonesome adventure, but one of a huge company ? Surely the feel of these other shoulders touching ours, as they too swing on their way to the same far goals and glorious ideals, heartens us. And does not the fact that all these masses of men and women, in every land and age and circumstance, have felt as we feel, have believed as we believe, know what we know, have had experience of our experiences—must not that quite legitimately make our own souls doubly sure ? Yes, and as in these few tremendously exciting prenatal months the new life, so to speak, pushes its way with those soft little hands through difficulties hat it took the race untold æons to surmount, climbs at a un giddy heights which baffled all progress for centuries on centuries, till at long last a precarious path was found up to the summit ; so these frail, blundering souls of ours are helped upon their way immeasurably by those who went before us. We haven't to cut a slow path through virgin jungle, but can advance quickly and with ease because innumerable others with painful toil have worn a track for us. We haven't to start at the beginning of things or near it, again because innumerable others made discoveries, awesome in their momentousness, though they come to us now as commonplaces. We haven't to find the big things for ourselves ; just open our eyes and they are there, left us as an inheritance. How can we ever thank the mighty spirits—aye, and the plain folk too—of former days who daringly took Christ's tremendous promises into their hands, and had the audacity to feel that these incredible-

sounding words might possibly be true, risked their whole weight upon them, found that they held, and handed on the glorious tradition? Or what do we not owe to those known to ourselves who in our childhood set our minds towards God, made Him a great fact in our life, so that we cannot forget for long, grow home-sick, have to rise and run to our own place with Him; and to those who, later, proved to us by their characters the splendour of holiness and the power of Jesus Christ in hearts frail as our own?

Why, every time we come into God's House do we at all realize how great a difference our fellow-worshippers make in our souls? For does not the fact that they are there, lining the road, that they too apparently think that there may be something in the rumour that Christ is to pass that way that day, and have gathered on the assumption He will really come—some of them hanging about a little idly, it may be, some of them very sure the news is true, but all of them crediting it enough to be there—does not that make our own soul more expectant?

Once in the night, in France, I heard a baby crying, and with that it came home to me that, behind all the babel of our varying tongues, the language of essential human need is the same everywhere. So, the world over, deep underneath the storms of faction and of differing views, all Christian folk have the same wants, and hold the same assurances, and find themselves met and surrounded by the same amazing grace of God. And surely that weight of corroborating evidence is not a little thing, but one that rightly makes one's own faith not just faith, but a conviction that is certainty.

But in particular is it not impressive that, even in those early days, this man already felt what ought to have grown much more vivid to us with the passage of time, that we Christians now on earth are merely the rear ranks of a vast procession winding its long way through the centuries; that

if we as yet are still in the shadow, look yonder, how they pass into the glory of the sunlight, row on row; that if for us, stumbling and struggling on, it is largely only a hope as yet, for the huge majority of Christians the faith has worked out. They have attained; their hands are on the goal; for them the promises, even the best of them, have all come true; and what to us is but a far-off dream that seems to draw no nearer, climb desperately towards it how we may, that is for them the only fact, the one reality.

Till sorrow comes to our own door, we don't think much about the dead, are far too busy with this fascinating world; or, like Lamb, feel a little haughty toward them. Their day is over: ours is still here. But this great spirit is too wise to let them slip from mind. For as every man who ever played the hero in its uniform, even long years ago, gives a rush and impetus to a battalion's charge, so day by day he knew he was a better man because of them; their victory inspired him, steadied him, heartened him in his own fight. However tired in soul he felt, hearing that far-off shout, he leapt up to his feet again, eager once more. Please God, I too will play the man! Always there came a message from the blessed dead that rallied him.

And that is surely as it ought to be. Death is the most arresting of preachers. Even when Christ comes we are often too busy and rushed about other things to be bothered to pay any heed. But when Death speaks, there is an instant hush in the whole house; everything else is stilled that we may listen. And he does teach us some things that we don't wholly forget—some discipline of spirit, learning obedience like the Master from the things that we suffer; some first-hand knowledge of the presence and reality and amazing sufficiency of Christ; some bewildered understanding of the unutterable tenderness of God. These things are much too sacred to be blabbed abroad. There is a seemly reticence of soul. Did not God's own hands cast a darkness round the cross? But some day we may be allowed to thank Him face to face.

Yes, but there should be something more even than that. Our dear ones pass, not out but in. They pass. Perhaps we watch them slipping slowly down the river, on to the estuary, out into the open sea, till the speck fades away, is lost beyond the horizon in the glory of the setting sun, and we turn back into an empty world with a huge blankness in our hearts. Or in a moment, without warning, they are gone; and we stand staring at a thing incredible and yet dreadfully real.

> "Suddenly they ran in with the wonderful news,
> 'The Master is come, and is calling for you!'
> And when she heard that, quickly she arose,
> And went to Him, and found it really true."

Well, we can't grudge Christ even our dearest. And when He asks, "Lovest thou Me?" and though in our hearts we know we do, searching feverishly we can find nothing worth putting forward as a proof of it, perhaps the fact that He had not to wrench away our fingers, that we gave, trying to smile at Him who took, may serve. In any case, they go. Yes, says Tennyson, and there comes back no message from them any more. They disappear into a terrible, blank silence, a dumb darkness, that is just as blank and dark and silent as before. But is that really true? It isn't like Christ to take without giving anything. In point of fact, it is not true; a message does come from the blessed dead, impressive in itself, but how much more since spoken by a voice that our heart can't mistake!

I am, of course, not talking of that ghastly business of eavesdropping, with its pettiness and sheer squalor. These people cannot understand how much they hurt us. For death is so stately and so ennobling. Gently it passes its hand over an old, old wrinkled face, and forty years of care and tire are gone. Or, as we stand looking down upon some dear one, we have to fall upon our knees, awed by the majesty and calm, by a certain royal sovereignty that has crowned her. And into such a sacred hush these creatures burst

with their stupid vulgarities and inane chatter! One can forgive our generation many things—its odd throws-back to much that is frankly primitive, its queer futurist art, its openly barbaric dances, its music maddeningly insistent and monotonous as the tom-tom from which it is sprung, its curious poetry with its haunted terror of the beautiful; but when they seek to trick out the dead—our dead—in the shabby trappings of their prosaic and diseased imaginations, self-control snaps, and a clean anger rushes over us. "Keep your hands off my dead!"

No! No! not that. And yet a message does come through. When the cataclysm of some great sorrow begins to settle down, things are in no sense what they were before. Life has fallen into new contours; our thinking runs in deeper channels, or has sought out other courses altogether; we live in a new land of far distances and vast horizons, and even the familiar scenery about us is all somehow changed.

To begin with, for us there are no dead. Our dear ones have proved that. In Maeterlinck's play it is in the graveyard that the children make that huge discovery. "But where are the dead? There are no dead." And it is standing beside some loved one's grave that the thought of death becomes incredible; it just won't think; and hearing others still talking as if it were true, we look at one another almost awkwardly, as grown-ups do when children speak of Santa Claus. We don't argue about it; it is too stupid for that; only a silly fable that we have outgrown. When Matthew Arnold's father died, he couldn't think of him as in the grave. Somewhere in God's universe, he knew, he was still carrying through some great beneficent work, and helping lesser souls. There in the chapel, staring at the tomb, the son had never a doubt of that. When Dante brooded on the central affection of his life, it was never to him a lovely thing that was over. "Thus I believe," he wrote—and Browning in his dark day copied it with a like full assurance into his dead wife's Testament—

"Thus I believe, thus I affirm, thus I am certain it is, and that from this life I shall pass to another better, there where that Lady lives of whom my soul was enamoured." The dear dust has perished, the feet that ran for us, the hands quick to leap out to help us, aye, or any one, the face that smiled, the thing of all things in the world that we loved best has crumbled, but not into nothingness. For Nature, which looks so extravagantly prodigal, will, in her wise economy, use it again in the springing of the flowers, and in the rustling of the leaves upon the tree. And has the soul, the glory of Christlikeness, the real wonder, all that meant and mattered far the most, gone out, and that for ever? "Only the things that he used remain," says an early Chinese poet, gazing about him at the empty house. Is that true in the absolute sense? Such hopelessness won't form within the mind. All that we loved has not blown out and ceased to be; it is as real as ever yonder, every dear atom of it, better than we knew it, because glorified and come into full flower.

So certain are we of that, that it is almost with a shock we realize that this is not simply a natural feeling that every one must share, but that this, too, in very large degree we owe to Christ—the wonderful Christ! Plutarch was sure of immortality at times, felt that the providence of God goes out if you deny it, and that this world of ours tumbles into a meaningless chaos. Yet read the pathetic letter he, most loving of souls, wrote to his wife when their little lass was taken, full of affection and of wistful memories that smile bravely enough though with wet eyes, jealously recalling, as one does, the characteristic nothings, childish generosities, the fond wee mother's anxious kindnesses to her dolls, and the like, all the poor, faded little keepsakes that the sore heart cherishes—a beautiful letter. But how dimly the hope burns even in him! The dead went out, or at most passed into a shadowy world, a thin, bleached life. The best was over. So much so, that Gibbon is convinced that one of

the main reasons why Christianity swept like a fire across the world was that it made men sure of a full immortality. That is likely enough. For think of that dark, bleak, comfortless land in which they lived, with no balm in it for torn spirits, no hope ahead for broken hearts, and suddenly in that cold, shivery blackness there leapt up this glorious light. No wonder men's hearts raced to it.

No doubt, even without it we would still have not a little; enough to make us turn and stare at God, marvelling at the hugeness of His generosity. When they condoled with the Earl of Ormonde of the Civil War on his son's death, he looked at them uncomprehendingly; and then, a hint of what they meant breaking in on his mind, he answered, almost hurt and angry, "Know that I would sooner be the father of my dead son, than of any living son in Christendom." Nothing can rob us of the proud and gracious memories; nothing can ever change this blessed fact that they were ours.

And yet how much it means to have this glory on ahead. And how simply that vast gift was given to us. Here were the disciples, crushed and broken, shivering over the grey ashes of their hopes, all out, all cold; and then somehow they knew Christ was not dead. Though with their own eyes they had seen Him dead, He was not dead. Of that they were quite sure. And so it is, in measure, with our dead. For the great Christian doctrines are not intellectual subtleties. They spring out of the heart, and life, and actual experience. There are no dead. And it is our own so-called dead who, calling back to us, have taught us to know that with certainty.

Further, one's whole mental geography is radically changed. I used to think that a huge gap yawned between earth and heaven, a weary waste of endless waters. But it is not so. They lie quite close to one another, queerly near. "I cannot say that I realize what has happened," wrote Rainy after his wife's death; "I know she is gone who was the light of my home and of my life. But I don't

know what it means. I would not be the least surprised if she opened the door, and walked in. It is as if she were in another room. And so she is, but it is higher up on the everlasting hills." That is a transcript straight from life; always one feels their nearness. When the Master, looking round on that dazed little group, declared, "It is expedient for you that I go away, for so I shall draw nearer you," He spoke the literal fact. And they, too, are not farther off but nearer. more in our minds and hearts and lives than ever. Death is the poorest of robbers: he snatches the handful of our goods that lies open and visible. But the real treasure in our heart remains untouched. Browning takes up a bit of wood snapt into two, and, "Look," he says, "how clean and fresh the splinters keep; only a touch and we combine," and with that fits them into one again. "Only a touch and we combine." And we touch many times. That is a noble paraphrase that tells us how the blessed dead are met and welcomed by the heavenly hosts, and how "together to their Father's house with joyful hearts they go." But at first, although loyally one tried to enter into their happiness and be happy in it, it was with a rather lonesome sense of being shut out of it all meanwhile, as though a ragged urchin on the hot, dusty street were peering through closed iron gates into coolness and shade and beauties that are not for him. But we are not shut out. As often as we turn to God we find them there beside Him, and together to our Father's house with joyful hearts we go, and stand there holding hands like children; and then with a smile they hasten to their great tasks yonder, and we, crude blunderers, who are not ready for that yet, turn back to our own small ones here.

"Happy the moment when we are seated in the Palace, thou and I,
With two forms and with two figures, but with one soul, thou and I.
Thou and I, individuals no more, shall be mingled in ecstasy,
Joyful and secure from foolish babble, thou and I;
All the bright-plumed birds of heaven will devour their hearts with envy

In the place where we shall laugh in such a fashion, thou and I:
This is the greatest wonder, that thou and I, sitting here in the same nook,
Are in this moment both in Iraq and Khorāsan—thou and I."

So Jallaluddin Rumi long ago. Ah! but there is a greater wonder still—that two, no longer in the same nook here, but separated far as eternity from time, can at one moment be together in the heavenly places, thrilled by the glory of the one, and, on the earth, helping the stumbling of the other —thou and I.

And when we are at prayer, how big a place they hold in it! Don't let us talk sheer silliness about prayers for the dead. When a boy leaves the home for some far land, do you omit him when you speak to God, or does he have a double place, just because, cut off from him, your hands are so useless, and your love for him feels so helpless, that your affection rushes down the only channel that is left to it with fuller flow. Put a little human nature into your religion. You have Christ's authority for that. Did He not tell us to take our own father's heart as a real index of the ways of God? And here too, surely, you can trust your natural instincts.

Even prayers to the saints, with all the wildness of their folly and extravagance, had probably a very natural origin. Two hearts had everything in common, shared all secrets, leaned upon each other in the living of their lives. And then one of them is taken, and one left behind. And when the latter, kneeling before God, feels that other very near, what wonder or what harm if in the old way, as he did every day, he talks out his difficulties, and looks for the old guidance? That is not prayer; but simply the familiar comradeship bridging the gulf of death.

But can they help? I do not know. Certainly when Tennyson in his lovely verses pictures his dead friend and he as two boys brought up in some little village, near which, while the other has been soaring up to some high office in

the State, he is still ploughing the old fields, a mere peasant still, and stands there in the furrows, hot and muddy, wondering whether his old friend ever remembers him—that doubt leaves me cold, awakens no misgivings. Of course I won't and can't forget you, declared Christ; of course, wherever I may be, just because you are you, just because I am I, just because I and you must always be so much to one another. And can't we argue down from Him to them who have put on His likeness? Certainly they remember. And God does not work in a vacuum, but usually through men and women. Would it not be like Him to give them the happiness of being His instruments in helping us? At all events, things happen that feel like the touch of dear familiar hands. They are quite near.

This other thing at least is sure, that the centre of gravity of our whole life has shifted. Formerly heaven was a far-off, shadowy place, a vague blur in the mind, like the dimness which is all that human eyes see of some nebula, unthinkable in its vastness, staggering in its splendour, another universe far larger than our own, they tell us now; or like those dim millions in China that mean really nothing to us, so that impatiently we turn the paper to find something with some touch of human interest. But let one have a boy in China, and, of a sudden, things there gain an acute moment, and are followed with a rapt attention day by day. So here. For "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." And as we move about the streets our hearts are often in the heavenly places, so that it is with a jerk that we are brought down to the earth again. All which must have some real effect upon our thinking and the planning of our lives.

Mr. Spender declares that the great change in the religious thought of his day has been brought about by this, that we are recognizing that this earth of ours is not the centre of the universe, but a tiny little planet moving round a lesser sun, so tiny as to be entirely imperceptible even from the very nearest of the uncountable stars. Death also raises up

our earthbound eyes, and gives us a new standard. This world we thought so big dwindles into a very little thing. Seen from the walls of heaven, says Rossetti, it must seem only "a fretful midge," no more. And even to us who often think of heaven nowadays, much that looked solid and immeasurably worth our while we now see to be merely shadows. And as for the conventions that seemed so irresistible and that so carried us away. Take in the dead, says Mr. Huxley, and who are the majority? And why should we conform to the stupidities of a small tribe in a parochial backwater? In short, one grows to feel more or less like a man out in the East, who knows that in a little while he will be going home, rightly interested in the life about him, willingly spending himself for the community, yet never letting his roots run down immovably deep. For his real home is not there, but across the waters.

But, above all, to have our dear ones yonder ought to give a new vividness to our own hope, and a new edge and keenness to our own endeavour. We knew, of course, the saints of God win yonder. And yet, when that tremendous shout of triumph is blown back to us, to hear among it, plain and unmistakable, the voices that our hearts remember thrills and inspires like nothing else. This writer tells us that, for his part, every morning he rides out into the lists, like a young knight of God. And if, after the battle joins, his eyes wisely never leave Christ's face, before he closes he looks up at the victors looking on and cries, "Hope for me, wish for me, pray for me, and, please God, I shall not shame you in the living of my life to-day."

The fact is, when you think it out, what sorrow does is to give back one's youth. Youth is the time of dreams and hopes and longings and eager lookings forward. And then that passes, and there come possession, and a settling down, and a perhaps too bovine contentedness. For what we had was always there, and we came to take it all for granted. And then the best is taken. And, with that, we are back at

dreaming, hoping, longing, looking forward avidly. But that is youth again. And youth, though restless and dissatisfied, is a great time. Are we so vastly to be pitied after all? Stevenson once asked a yokel cleaning a byre in Fife if he never tired of his messy job: "No," said the man—and Stevenson proudly sent it south as a proof of what John Knox's schools have done for Scotland—"no; he that has aye something ayont need never weary."

And if the wait seems long, and hearts grow heavy—did you ever at the Front, in some monotony of wretchedness, or hunched up under shell fire, launch yourself on a dream of going home on leave—the tedium to the coast, the crossing, the long run up through the peaceful tranquillities of England, the eager waiting for the Border, the thrill of Scotland really here—no dream, but truth—one's own town, the familiar streets, the unchanged square, the running up the steps, the pulling at the bell, the opening door, and—the face that one loved best in all the world! And then, perhaps, somebody spoke, and you were back there in the mud and squalor! Yet it helped to bring one through. And, though one had to wait a long time, in the end it did come true; and then the dream proved to have been but a poor shadow of the wonderful reality. This time we may have to wait longer. But this also will come true. And when it does: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive the things God hath prepared for them that love Him." No doubt. And yet I think that I have guessed a little of His secret, and look to Him with loving gratitude, and with a heart all thrilly with excitement.

"Meantime the silent lip,
Meantime the climbing feet."

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